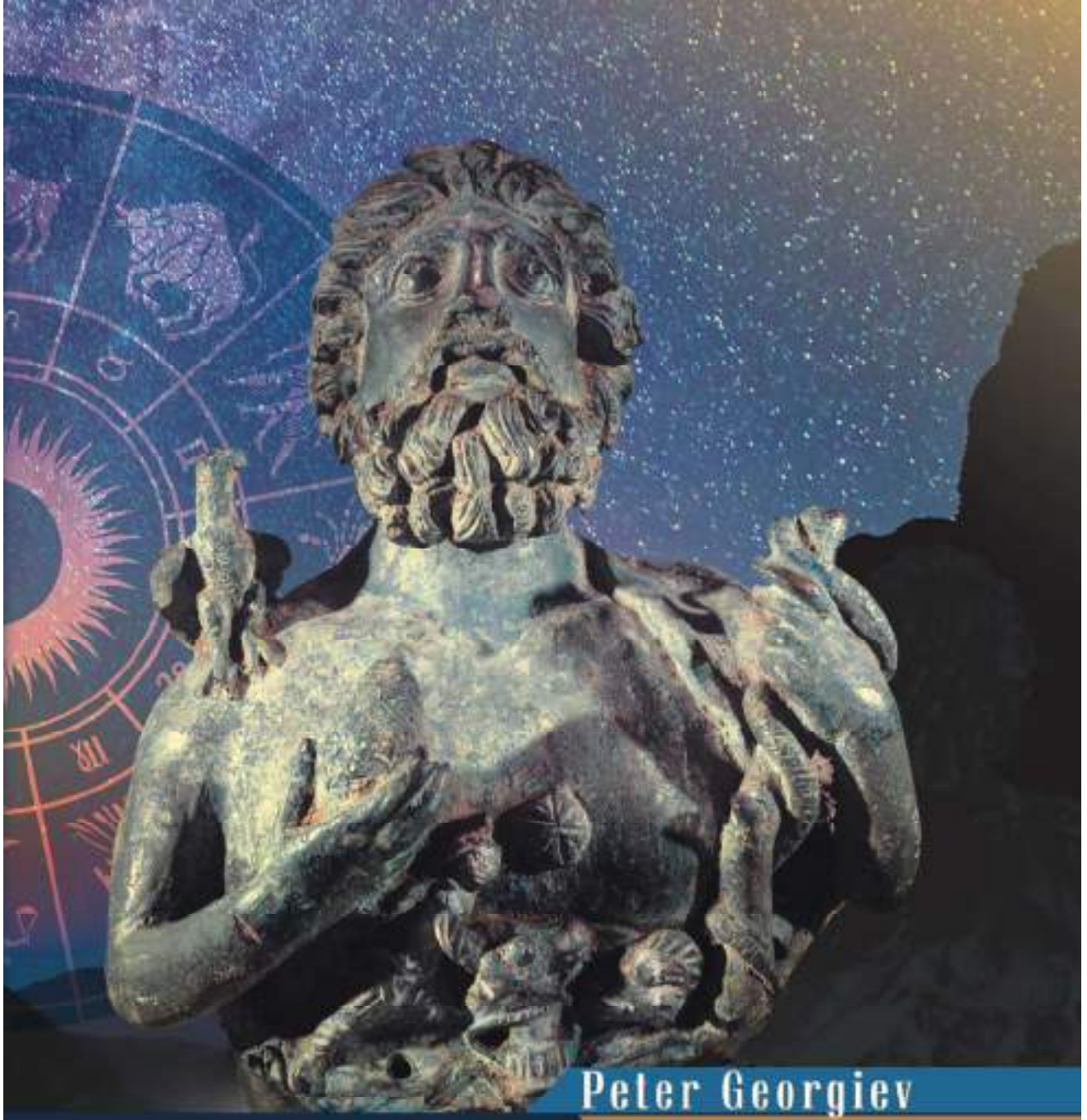

Peter Georgiev

THE MYSTERIES of MITHRA
or
THE MYSTERIES of SABAZIOS

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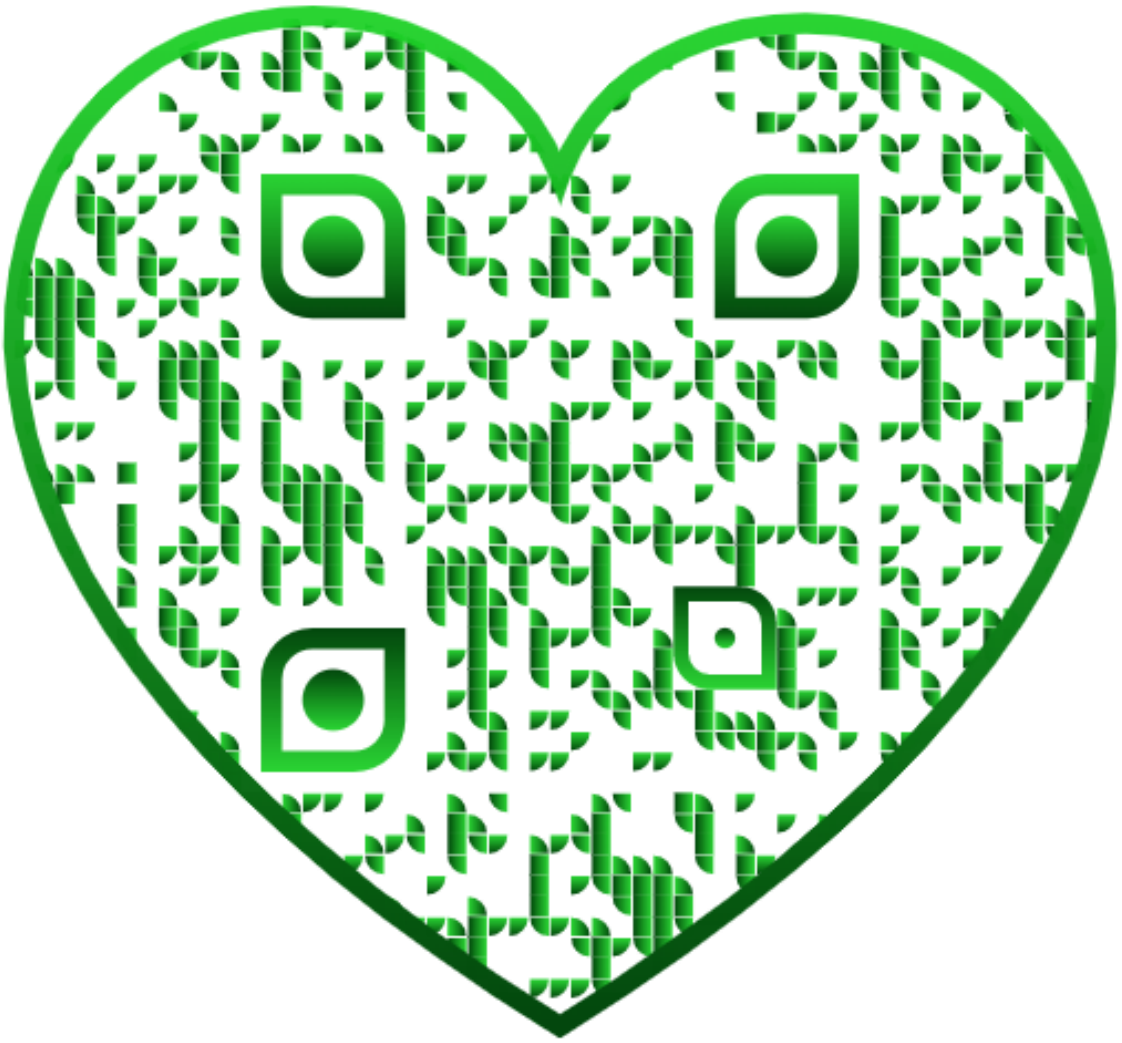

THE MYSTERIES OF MITHRA

or

THE MYSTERIES OF SABAZIOS

PETER GEORGIEV

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Although focused on the Roman Mithraism, this book is actually an analysis of the symbolic language of the material monuments of the Roman period – the so-called Mithra reliefs, Sabazios' hands, reliefs of Dionysus and of the Thracian Horseman.

The reliefs and sculpture compositions shown use the same symbolic language.

The compositions are also thematically synonymous – generally, they are an expression of religious piety and homage to the ritual religion of the Sun in its three hypostases – Zagreus, Dionysus, Sabazios.

Why was this book written?

The first international congress on the study of Mithraism was held in Manchester, England, in 1971. The congress criticised seriously Franz Cumont's formulation about the Iranian origin of Roman Mithraism. Suffice it to quote the position of one of the organisers: "Indeed, one can go further and say that the portrayal of Mithras given by Cumont is not merely unsupported by Iranian texts but is actually in serious conflict with known Iranian theology. Cumont reconstructs a primordial life of the god on earth, but such a concept is unthinkable in terms of known, specifically Zoroastrian, Iranian thought where the gods never, and apparently never could, live on earth "[1]

Neither the congresses, nor the later treatments have provided an answer to the question about the origin and the essence of Mithraism. This is what the present book should do, adhering to John R. Hinnells' advice who writes: "I would accept with R. Gordon that Mithraic scholars must in future start with the Roman evidence, not by outlining Zoroastrian myths and then making the Roman iconography fit that scheme. ...[2]".

Forty years after the congress, things have not changed. Despite the statements and the conclusions, the researchers continued with the old scheme – pouring Persian analogies in the Roman forms or vice versa. The result is deplorable – there is nothing in common between the iconography and the written materials. This is so because the common thing between the Persian Mithra and the Roman one is just the name.

The method stated by John R. Hinnells lies in the basis of this book – we will talk mainly about the symbolism of the iconography of Mithra-Dionysus-Sabazios in Europe and Asia Minor from the Roman period and I think that it, along with the information from the written sources, will outline clearly the image of the Roman Mithra and Roman Mithraism in Europe. The images from the reliefs are elements of a symbolic language, which is extinct for us, unfortunately. Whether I have deciphered it correctly – I hope so.

Although Mithra is usually said to be a Persian god, it was not in Persia that it was mentioned first. Mithra is present almost at one and the same time both in the Hittites of Asia Minor (the agreement with the Mitanni) and in the religious Rigveda hymns – after 1600 BC, where he is accompanied by the gods Varuna and Ahriman[3]. In the main sacred book of Zoroastrianism, Avesta, Mithra is mentioned in the period 1000-600 BC as a god of secondary importance. Significantly later, in 404-259 BC, Mithra was placed alongside the main god Ahura Mazda and Anahita in the monuments of Artaxerxes. Much later, Antiochus I Theos (69 BC – ca. 36 BC), the King of the Anatolian kingdom of Commagene, son of Mithridates I

Callinicus (Mithridates – given by Mithra), erected a temple, in which one of the statues is called „Apollo-Mithra-Helios-Hermes“. This compound name has its history – it is said that Antiochus was a distant descendant of Alexander the Great and for this reason he aspired to combine in one the gods of his predecessors, to erect a monument of all gods.

In the 1st century, Plutarch describes Cilician pirates, defeated by Pompey a hundred years earlier, who “celebrated some secret rituals, among which those of Mithra, which continue till nowadays”. This quotation is the reason why later on, the Roman rituals were groundlessly related to Mithra of Cilicia but we do not know who the Cilician Mithra was, nor what his rituals were. What we can and should do is familiarise ourselves with the Roman Mithra.

During the 1st century, the Emperor of the Kushan Empire minted coins with the image of a man with a nimbus and the inscription MIIPO[4]. The Kushans are Tochari (Yuezhi) who had been living in the Xinjiang province of China. However, Ptolemy[5] says – “this potent solar deity was worshipped in all the countries that stretched from India to Assyria”.

Probably, this wide spread gives the grounds to define the cult to Mithra in the Roman Empire as Persian but this is not serious. However, who was the first person in Europe to state that the man’s figure sacrificing a bull and looking at the rising sun is the Persian Mithra? According to Richard Gordon[6], this was probably done in 1550 by the naturalist Ulisse Aldrovandi who, while describing a sculpture in Cardinal Pio da Carpi’s garden, mentions a niche, in which there is the “God Mithra of the Persians who is killing a bull“. Only twenty pages above in his exposition, Aldrovandi writes about a “man killing a bull”. Probably it is Martin Smetius[7], who has stronger reasons to assert that the one who makes the sacrifice is God (although gods kill but do not make sacrifices), as he describes several inscriptions with the name Mithra, including the inscriptions on the Capitol’s relief, which is kept nowadays at the Museum of the City of Lens – DEO SOL IINVICTO MITRHE and NAMA SEBESIO. Before that, however, the Persian origin of Mithra was acknowledged in the earliest literature about them. It is by the Latin poet Statius who while writing about the 80AD describes Mithra as a person who ‘twists the unruly horns beneath the rocks of a Persian cave’[8]. Yes, Mithra was famous *mainly* as a Persian god, this is important. The Roman Mithra was a god in a secret society – what can we write about a secret that we learn about from later Christian comments?

A demonstration of the Iranian connection is also a text by Saint Jerome[9], confirmed by a series of inscriptions, which contains the seven stages in the admission, one of them being *the Persian*: The musthV, (*sacratus*) takes in sequence the names of the Crow (*corax*), the Husband (*cryptius*), the Soldier (*miles*), the Lion (*leo*), the Persian (*perses*), the Messenger of the Sun (*heliodromus*) and the Father (*pater*).

In 1903, (113 years ago) Franz Cumont issued his work “The Mysteries of Mithra” where he further develops the thesis about the Persian origin of the Roman Mithraism despite the absence of any archaeological evidence in Asia Minor, and in

Cilicia and Commagene in particular, about a cult to Mithra of the Roman type. This is also what Cumont admits and asks: *"Why are no vestiges of the Persian Mysteries found in Asia Propria, in Bithynia, in Galatia, in the provinces adjoining those where they were practised for centuries?*" And he replies to himself: *„... because at least from the time of Vespasian no legion was charged with the defence or surveillance of their territory."*

This quotation is indicative. Roman Mithraism is where the Roman legions are. Cumont continues: "and if we wish to assign absolutely the circumstances of its origin (and distribution of Mithraism) we may take it for granted, with every likelihood of truth, that the eighth legion, which was transferred *from Moesia* to Upper Germany in the year 70 A.D., first practised there the religion, which was soon destined to become the preponderating one in this country. And a little bit further: "...the Persian religion was practised in Africa almost exclusively by those whom military service had called to these countries from abroad; and the bands of the faithful were composed for the most part, if not of Asiatics, at least of recruits drawn from the *Danubian provinces"*.

The fact that the legions brought Mithraism was marked also by Vermaseren[10]: "Material evidence from the second century A.D. shows that wherever the Romans planted the standards (flags), Mithra and his cult followed… There is throughout a strong connection *between the Danubian provinces*, where the Mithra cult is widespread in the outposts, and Africa". Vermaseren gives as an example Valerius Maximianus born in the modern Pettau or Ptuj, Slovenia, Dalmatia, where he consecrated Mithraic temples in Alba Julia (Dacia) and Numidia. Vermasern continues: Evidence of Mithraism can be found at Troesmis in Moesia and also in Sitifs (Setif) in Africa, both places where the Second Legion (Legio II Herculia) was stationed at different times. M. Aurelius Sabinus, who came from Carnuntum (Deutsch-Altenburg) east of Vindobona (Vienna), where Mithras enjoyed profound reverence, consecrated as commander an altar at Lambaesis." Vermaseren describes also the case, in which M. Aurelius Rufinus, born in the town of *Bizye* in Thrace, being member of the Septimius Serverus' expedition to Palaepolis on the island of Andros, consecrated a Mithraic temple in a cave. Probably, according to Varmaseren, Rufinus was initiated into the cult *at his birthplace*.

Whether it is by chance or not, in the information provided by Cumont and Vermaseren the participants in these actions are soldiers from the Balkan region. This confirms the scheme of distribution of the artefacts of the Mithra cult (see the enclosed map) – the first two centres are in the Balkans – present-day Northern Bulgaria and Dalmatia-Pannonia. The second centre is Germany where the legion camps are. "Actually, Germany is the country where the biggest number of *Mithra temples* were discovered, the bas-reliefs are imposing in size and most complete in composition – Cumont writes. The third centre is Rome where the main part of slaves from the conquered Balkan lands was probably directed and where there was "a large garrison made up of soldiers drawn from all parts of the empire and the veterans of the army, after having been *honourably discharged,* flocked thither in great numbers to spend the remainder of their days"[11].

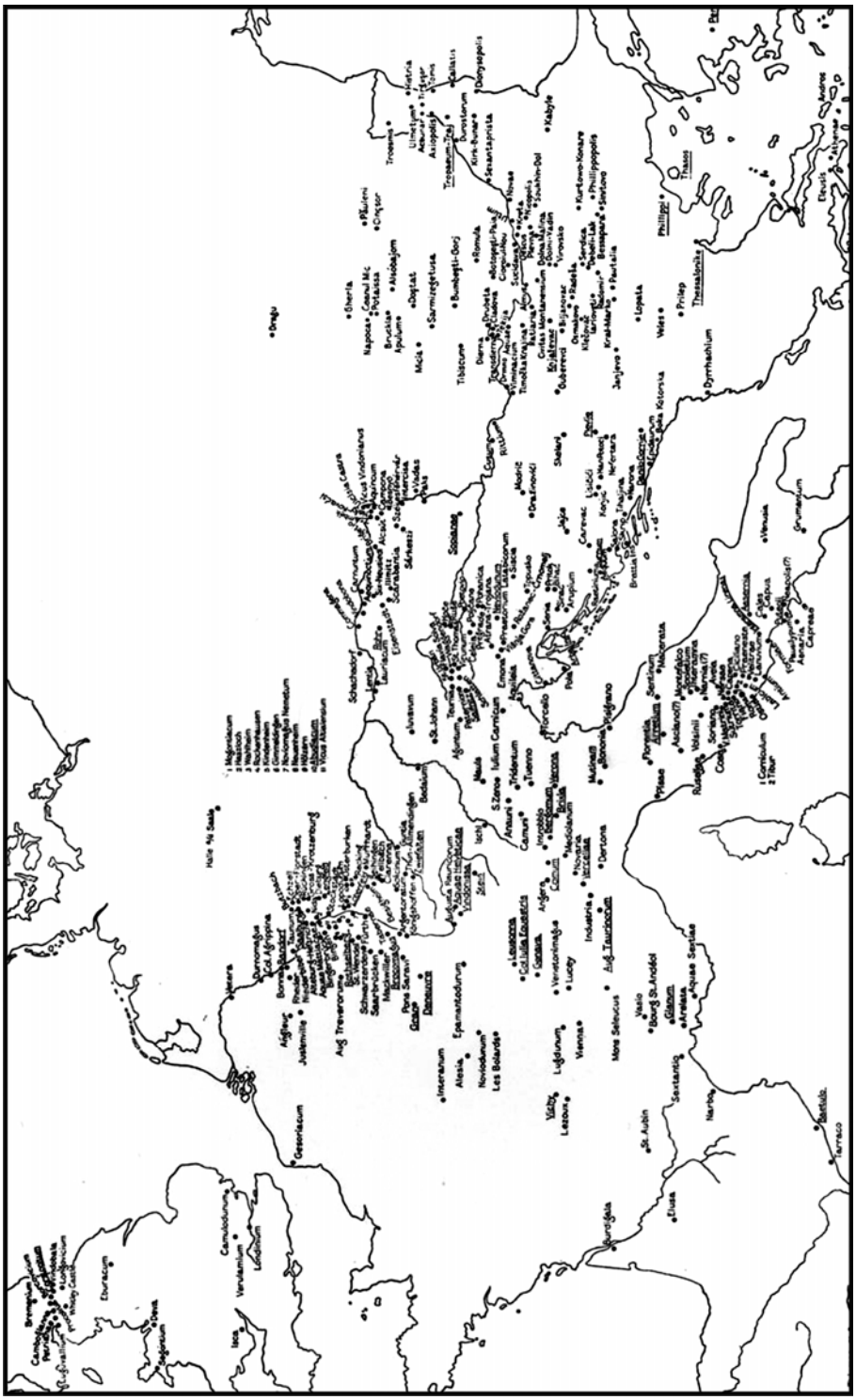
When quoting Cumont and Vermaseren, there is an interesting statement by the latter regarding the roots of the Roman iconography: "...In my humble opinion, this cult is based more on the Hellenic concepts rather than on the Iranian substrate, as the brilliant Franz Cumont once believed"[12].

The main source used in this book is the so-called "Corpus Inscriptionum et Monumentorum Religionis Mithriacae" (CIMRM), Vermaseren[13], or in particular, the version by Gordon, Richard, L. (2004), "CIMRM Cupplement", Electronic Journal of Mithraic Studies.

A map of the important finds of Mithraism in Europe[14].
1. Thrace, Moesia, Dacia, Illyria, Pannonia, South Italy.

2. Germany, North Italy, Britain, France.

3. Germany, France, North Italy, Britain.

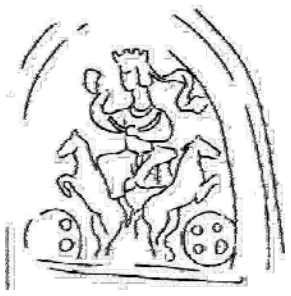


The Mithra Iconography

According to Herodotus, the Persians "have no images of the gods, no temples nor altars, and consider the use of them a sign of folly. This comes, I think, from their not believing the gods to have the same nature with men, as the Greeks imagine"[15]. It was probably like this during Herodotus' time but three hundred years later Antiochus erected a monument in Comagena – a unified image of Apollo-Mithra-Helios-Hermes as the God of "all people". On the relief, Mithra has a nimbus of light, similarly to Helios, he is dressed like the Persian Antiochus, wearing a Thracian- Phrygian hat and with a knife in hand. A knife – a distinguishing sign of the Roman Mithra.

On Artaxerxes' relief, Mithra is portrayed with a nimbus of rays, too.

CIMRM 30



Reliefs from Persia with images, which are said to be images of Mithra. In Europe, the Sun God, also called Helios, was depicted sitting in the chariot with four horses.

The images ascribed to Mithra in Persia can be counted on the fingers of one's hand, but they have nothing to do with the iconography of the Roman Mithraism.

The Rigveda and Avesta texts do not depict Mithra as the sun[16], but as the bearer of light. This is the reason why he was portrayed with a sun nimbus. The identification of Mithra with the Sun is a later interpretation. However, the late Roman Mithra does not even have such a nimbus and this is the first difference from the images of the Persian Mithra.

CIMRM 641

The Roman god Sol and Mithra from a Mithra relief.

This image of Mithra and Sol is indicative – it defines Sol and Mithra as two very distinct characters, and Mithra as an object that has nothing to do with the Sun.

Mithra was not portrayed as a sun on the Roman reliefs, there is no inscription either that directly states that Mithra is a Sun.

The above image of Mithra and Sol is part of the image called *Mithra's Banquet*. On the reverse side of the plate, the scene shown below is depicted – a typical scene of a Mithra relief, the bull slaughtering.

CIMRM 641

A relief "Mithra sacrifices a bull", Louvre

On the relief, the Invincible Mithra, Sol Invicto, has stabbed the bull with a knife; there are also a snake, a dog, a scorpion and a crow. In the two upper corners, there are a man and a woman symbolising the Sun and the Moon.

The relief is typical for the predominant part of Mithra reliefs. As usual, the bull's tail ends with wheat ears.

Usually, the relief is thought to be "an imitation of the motif of the classical Greek group of *Nike sacrificing a bull*".

The sculpture of Nike sacrificing a bull

However, the sculpture of Nike could hardly be the only followed pattern of representing a sacrifice; the golden Geto-Dacian Helmet of Poiana Coțofeneşti is also from the IV century BC and it presents the same idea of iconography with the victim here being a ram; the Ancient reliefs of Panticapaeum, Kerch, 1 BC.

CIMRM 11

CIMRM 12

A Geto-Dacian Helmet, Kerch, a sacrifice

Another relief – that from the Pergamon Museum, Berlin – will tell us more about the meaning of the depicted group. There is a surprising fact: in addition to the standard figures of Mithra – a bull, a dog, a scorpion and a crow, there is a woman with a basket full of fruits by the snake; a figure, which cannot be seen in any other relief of the Mithraism iconography. The basket full of fruits is a symbol of pregnancy as the woman's figure itself shows.

The second surprise is that despite the extensive diverse comments on all other images, there are no comments about this image, it is not noted by the otherwise verbose commentators of Mithraism.

Pergamon Museum in Berlin

In this relief, there are two topics: the inevitable death and the birth – the knife is not yet stabbed in the bull, the infant has not been born, yet. But who dies and who is born?

A bull sacrifice, Sabazios

In ancient Egypt, the god of fertility is the continuation of Amun Ra. Every spring, the bull Apis was ritually slaughtered to resurrect again from the mud of the rising waters of the Nile into the image of the young Osiris. The ritual death of Apis and his resurrection are celebrated in Egypt every spring, outlining the annual solar cycle. The regular repetition of the ritual has associated firmly the image of the bull with the God of Fertility and Apis is depicted exactly in this way – a bull with *a Sun* and *a Serpent* between the horns that resemble *a Moon.* There is a serpent depicted above the bull's head. We will see this serpent later on, with the bull from the Mithra reliefs, and it is firmly connected to it.

There are lots of elements in the Mithraic reliefs that show that it is actually a matter of depicting such a sacrifice, in which the bull personifies the god of fertility.

1. In most cases, the bull is portrayed with a tail of wheat ears, which clearly speaks about the nature of the image – the bull is associated with fertility similarly to the Egyptian Apis

2. What is left from the old year? Seeds that we will use during the new year. The scorpion tears off the bull's testicles, it preserves the semen. Autumn ends during the Scorpio sign (24 October)[17] when the fruits of the year are harvested.

3. The depiction of the rising sun and the setting moon in the upper corners shows the time cycle – the change of seasons. Often, the sun is carried on a horse-driven chariot and the setting moon – the symbol of the long winter nights – is on a carriage towed by bulls.

Christie's catalogue

The two figures with torches: the left one – next to the rising sun – is upright, while the right one is leaning; to the left there is a cock – a symbol of the rising sun, and to the right – the owl – a symbol of the night. The change of seasons is clearly emphasized.

The other elements of the relief: the crow – a symbol of a messenger in antiquity – will spread the news about the birth of the new sun, the dog is a symbol of a companion in the world beyond.

The gods of fertility (Telipinu of the Hittites, Sabazios in Asia Minor and Thrace, Baal in Babylon) have been depicted as adult men, the latter two imaged either with bull's horns or with the sign of the setting Moon.

Telipinu

Sabazios

The ceremonial celebrations of the change of seasons are traditional in the Balkans, too. According to Macrobius[18]: "in Thrace the Sun is called Sabazios and the Thracians celebrate him with magnificent piety". Sabazios is celebrated nowadays, too – Etropole[19], Strandzha[20]; there are dozens of reliefs of the Thracian horseman holding up three of his fingers – a gesture known as the "gesture of Sabazios".

Is there an element of *the Mithra imagery* that directly states that the bull is a symbol of the dying cyclic god of fertility, always dying and always coming to birth? Yes, there is – this is an inscription on one of the best produced figures that have been found in the Rome's Capitol, now in the New Louvre Museum, Lens, France. Under Mithra, there is an inscription: *DEO SOL INVICTO MITRHE.* The inscription is graphite, the standard in similar inscriptions reads: "the invincible god Sol of Mithra"; next to the Mithra's knife, over the bull, it is written: NAMA SEBEZI.

According to Cumont, NAMA SEBESIO is either a spell or a Persian greeting. The wrong spelling of the word “name” can be suggested here, which is written in Latin as *nominis*, in Galician, Portuguese and Italian – *nome,* German – *name*, Romanian – *nume*, French – *nom,* Swedish – *namn*. However, there is more probable version that *NAMA* is the Sanskrit word *nama*, translated as *glory, bow*, *reverence*, which matches well the concept of the book[21] and further clarifies the exposition.

CIMRM 415-416

The relief in the New Louvre in Lens

The NAMA SEBESIO inscription

Is the bull, which Mithra kills, really the image of Sabazios? Sabazios who is being killed so that the new sun is born. What should be the relief that would depict the murder of Sabazios by Mithra? Of course, this should be the act of the murder itself. This act of the murder of Sabazios by Mithra is depicted on a sculpture from the Capitol, which is now kept at the Vatican Museum. The sculpture shows a bust

of Sabazios with the invariable fir-cone in the hand – the carrier of the semen. In front of Sabazios there is Mithra's figure in the typical pose from the bull's murder. However, there is no bull. Instead, Mithra has stabbed the knife in Sabazios. The expression on Sabazios' face is unambiguous – Sabazios is dying. What the relief shows has been expressed clearly and plainly – Mithra from the reliefs of the Roman Mithraism kills Sabazios; the bull is the symbol of Sabazios.

Vatican museum inv. No 12158[22]

To the front, there is a funeral urn, a serpent coiled around it, the Lion is to the right and the two torch-carriers bending their heads over the urn. This is a standard scene of mourning over the funeral urn depicted on many reliefs of Mithraism.

After the appearance of the lion and the serpent, it is time to answer the question – symbols of what are they?

Zagreus, Dionysus, Sabazios – a snake, a ram or a lion, a bull

"Helios, highest object of reverence for the horse-loving Thracians"[23]

In the middle of the Louvre relief (CIMRM 641), there is a sacrificial altar, on which a horned snake crawls, and in this relation Nonnus[24] describes how Zeus, "in the guise of a dragon", created Zagreus: "*By this marriage with the heavenly dragon, the womb of Persephone swelled with living fruit, and she bore Zagreus the horned baby*". Persephone is the wife of Hades, the ruler of the underworld.

The Boethian version about the birth of Zagreus explains: Zagreus was born from the union between Zeus and Semele (form Phrygian, Zemelo, Earth; Old Bulgarian – zemlya[25]). Zagreus born from the union between the Sky and the Earth.

The snake is *the symbol of the spirit* of Zagreus.

The name Zagreus has no meaning in Greek (it is translated approximately as "hunter"), however, it has a beautiful meaning in Bulgarian – "shine", "rise", which perfectly describes the ritual sun religion with the sunrise, the birth of Zagreus and later with the sacrifice of Sabazios, the sun god, whom the Thracians "celebrated with magnificent piety". And between Zagreus and Sabazios in the annual cycle, there is the time of the Thracian Dionysus, the inseminator. The snake is the symbol spirit of Zagreus, Dionysus and Sabazios.

The horned snake from a figure of Sabazios' hand, the same as in the images of Mithra.

On the reliefs of Dionysus' triumph, the following recurring symbols are clearly expressed: a basket with a snake coming out of it (birth), a small child (Zagreus), a ram (fertility), a lion (strength), a staff with a fir-cone (seed), an upturned vessel with water running out (a womb, a mother, birth). On the magnificent sarcophagus from the Metropolitan Museum, Dionysus has set his foot on the basket, from which the serpent comes out (the birth). Dionysus' foot on the basket means: this is past.

The serpent personifies birth, the lamb is the infant age of Dionysus; the lion, on which Dionysus is sitting – the youth Dionysus grown into manhood. This closeness identifies Dionysus with the lion, Dionysus is accompanied by a lion or has a lion's hide on his shoulders on dozens of reliefs.

Triumph of Dionysus[26]

The same gradation is shown on the reliefs on several sarcophagi: Walters Art Museum, Baltimore, Maryland, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, MA, Moscow, Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts. The depiction of the snake, the ram (lamb) and the lion on the reliefs of the Danubian Horsemen has the same age aspect, the same approach has been used also in the figures "Sabazios' Hands" where Sabazios is over the ram, above Dionysus' age.

There are dozens of coins from Pergamon showing the symbol of the birth of God.[27]

There are dozens of coins from Pergamon showing the symbol of the birth of God.[28]

A young lion as a symbol of Dionysus is present on the reliefs depicting festivities in celebration of Dionysus. On the bronze plate – Dionysus with his symbols – ivy, a lion, a staff with a fir-cone and the sign of the Sun above the head.

The reliefs in question reflect the picture of a complete ritual religion to the Sun, whose rituals are repeated annually, starting with the death of the Sun, in the face of Sabazios, the birth of Zagreus and continuing with the Dionysia in the spring.

The same gradation is present also on the so-called “Sabazios’ Hands”. After the birth in the cave with the messenger crow, there follow the table on the occasion of the birth with loaves of bread with a cross (found on Mithra reliefs, too), the ram, on which Sabazios is standing. Figuratively, the act means – this is past, Sabazios is above the time of the ram, he is close to the Moon, the symbol of “the other world”.

Seint Luis art museum

Melbourne museum, Pompeii

Figures of "Sabazios' Hands"

The hand expresses Sabazios' gesture – three fingers raised. Two of the raised fingers are marked with an eagle and the amphibian frog, symbolising the Sky and the Earth. The eagle holds in its talons a sheaf of lightning. Sabazios points at them both, the father and the mother.

The fir-cone on the third raised finger is a symbol of the tree of life, the spirit of life, of God, that spiritualised both the Earth and the Sky[29]. *Sabazios' gesture* expresses the unity of the trinity – the Holy Spirit, the Father and the Great Mother.

The "horned" snake, the spirit of Zagreus, Dionysus, Sabazios, has passed the way from the birth to the crater (the funeral urn) – a symbolic representation of life from birth until death.

The unity of Zagreus, Dionysus and Sabazios as the sun allegory of the annual cycle defines the snake, which is present in all three of them, as the spirit of Zagreus, of Dionysus and of Sabazios at the same time (as όφις παρείας with Demostenes, like the horned snake with Nonnus), and this spirit, being an immortal

substance, *remains after the death* of Sabazios (the snake around the funeral urn on the reliefs of Mithra and the Danubian Horsemen, the snake by the sacrificial altar of the killed bull). This is the same snake, coiled around the tree from the reliefs of the Thracian Horseman – an image of the universal non-personified god, sometimes referred to in a text or through implication.

The ram and the bull define the age characteristics, the lion – the quality ones.

What has been said about Sabazios is depicted with utmost clarity on the following two reliefs. The relief of Tanais shows the known composition from the reliefs of the Thracian Horseman, however, instead of a snake, as usual, a bull's head is depicted within the tree crown. The inscription under the horseman shows that it is a dedication to Tiberius Sauromates, a king from the Thracian dynasty of Rhescuporis and starts as follows: "The Basileus, being Sabazios", which probably meant "the king, being a follower of Sabazios".

A relief from Tanais

A relief of a Thracian Horseman, Istanbul

Both reliefs feature altars of the sun god Sabazios. On the first altar, his age symbol is represented, on the second one – his spirit and symbol, the snake. On the same altar, but on another instance, the sacrificial bull would be killed, the symbol of Sabazios.

Following the research on 665 monuments of the Thracian Horseman, Dilyana Boteva makes the daring conclusion: "From the point of view of the divine hierarchy *the snake god* stands higher (than the reset, depicted there, author's remark)"[30]. Yes, but with one clarification – not higher than God, the spirit of life, symbolised with the tree of life, around which the snake is coiled; his guardian, defender and protector.

These facts and the facts from the sources have allowed Alexander Fol to write that "*the reptile may be Sabazios himself in a zoomorphic image*"[31]. Fol is rather cautious – *perhaps he is* – the written sources are actually scarce. However, the language of the hundreds of relief states it clearly – the lion is a zoomorphic image of Dionysus, the bull – of Sabazios, the snake is their common beginning – the spirit.

On the following reliefs, the horseman is with three raised fingers – the sign of Sabazios in front of the symbol of the god Sabazios, or according to A. Fol, in front of his zoomorphic image.

On a substantial number of the several hundred thousand known reliefs of the Thracian Horseman, *which appeared at the same time* with the reliefs of the Roman Mithraism, the horseman makes a gift, a sacrifice or sends an appeal in front of a sacrificial altar, behind which there are the tree of life and the snake coiled around it.

The tree of life with the snake coiled around it can be found also on the reliefs of the Roman Mithraism, the tree, from which Mithra was born.

Taking the snake as an anthropomorphic image, or more precisely – a spirit of god Sabazios, he himself identified with the Sun – explains the images on the Roman coins from Pautalia, Augusta Traiana and Serdica, on which the chthonic creature, the snake, bears the sign of the Sun. The symbols engraved on the coins are interesting. There are three elements in them that connect them to Sabazios, the first of them being the sign of the Sun. The second sign also leads to Sabazios – some of the snakes are shown with beards, some have a crest, too. The third element is more essential – the tip of the tail ending with three wheat ears, a symbol of fertility.

The three ears on the tail tip are identical to the ones found on the bull's tail from the reliefs of the so-called Roman Mithraism.

This link is interesting and indicative, it again identifies the bull from the Mithra reliefs as an image of Sabazios. In concordance with the idea that Sabazios is the sun god that characterises the fertile last part of the year, there is an actual circumstance of his cyclic death, which explains the scene with his sacrifice similarly to the Egyptian traditions.

The evidence by the ancient authors:

Demosthenes[32] (330 BC): "The noble orgiasts, crowned with fennel and poplar, through the highways, squeezing the big-checked serpents, and lifting them over their heads, and shouting *Evœ Sabœ*", which shows that it is matter of celebrating Sabazios".

Clement of Alexandria[33] (II AD) – "Sabazios is the god drawn from the bosom, a snake."

Arnobius[34] (III–IV AD) adds "the golden snake".

Hesychius[35] (V AD): "The Thracian Dionysus is the other name for Sabazios" According to Hesychius *the Thracian Dionysus is not the Greek one.*

Aristophanes[36] (430 BC): "Judging by what we find at many places, it seems that Dionysus and Sabazios are one and the same deity".

Amphithea (II–III BC) – "Sabazios and Dionysus are the same thing".

Plutarch[37] (46–127 AD), while describing Olympias, the mother of Alexander, writes: "All of the women in this region, since ancient time, were inclined to Orphic rites and to the secret rites of Dionysus and have the name Klodones and Mimallones and performed many rites similar to the Edonian women and the Thracian women around [Mount] Haemus, from whom, it seems, the word threskeuin came to be used for intense [or immoderate] and superstitious [or odd in an excessive way] religious services[or sacrifices]. Now Olympias who, more than the other women, strove after these inspirations and carried out these frenzies more barbarically, introduced to the celebrating groups great tame serpents..."

A relief from Belintash, Bulgaria. Sabazios on a throne, with snakes coiled around him, holding in his hand a fir-cone as in the reliefs from Copenhagen and Albania.

The sources do not say much about the other reincarnation of Dionysus-Sabazios – in the image of a bull. Although not precisely, Diodorus mentions that "some people talk about the myth, that there was another, much more ancient Dionysus, the second Dionysus. For according to them there was born of Zeus and Persephone a Dionysus who is called by some Sabazios and taught people in farming. He was represented as wearing horns". Diodorus also adds: "As they felt ashamed of societies, they celebrated his birth and performed sacrifices *secretly and during the night*", which corresponds also to the sacrifices in a cave under lit torches in Mithraism.

The analogue of Sabazios, the Babylon god of fertility Baal, is depicted as a bull or wearing bull's horns.

Apis, the Egyptian god of fertility, is depicted as a bull with a sun disk between the horns.

The symbol of Sabazios is the two-horned moon (the hands of Sabazios, the relief from Copenhagen).

Zagreus was born a horned snake and his last reincarnation is a bull.

Plutarch writes that on the Pelasgian island of Tenedos there was a cow which received special care and when it gave birth to a bull calf, they would slaughter it with an axe, as if it were "*Zagreus, the young Dionysus*"[38]. Plutarch also says that "the women of Elis invoke him, praying that the god may come with the hoof of a bull"[39], and also that "many of the Greeks make statues of Dionysus in the form of a bull"[40].

In crazy exultation, the maenads of Euripides in Dionysus' triumphs tear to pieces bulls on the meadows, similarly to the concept of the later expression "tasting the body of god".

The king of Pergamon, Attalus, who introduced the cult to Sabazios in the kingdom, was called "the son of the bull", "wearing bull's horns".

The shown sculptures of Dionysus, "the young Sabazios", are also with bull's horns just showing.

Heraklion, Crete

Beirut

Le Louvre

The horned snake and the bull are shown side by side in the Mithraeum in Ostia.

The reliefs of the Thracian horseman and the relief of the Roman Mithraism appeared at the same time and reflect the same thing – reverence to the Sun God. The written sources and the reliefs outline the ritual religion of the Thracians as annual cyclic rituals to the Sun God with Hypostases in the images of Zagreus, Dionysus, Sabazios, which is also the reason for Alexander Fol to title his books about the Thracian religion as "The Thracian Zagreus Dionysus" and "The Thracian Dionysus Sabazios".

The Crater, the Lion and the Snake

On a significant part of the Mithra reliefs there are a lion and a snake, bent down over an upright vessel, similarly to the one from the reliefs of the Danubian Horsemen. The upright vessel in ancient iconography in the respective context is the funeral urn. As already said, the snake and the lion symbolise Zagreus and Dionysus, two of the hypostases of the sun god. On the vessel from the Cologne Museum shown below, in addition to the sun and the two torch-carriers, there are a lion and a snake being the handles of the urn vessel. What do the symbols of Zagreus and Dionysus above the funeral urn mean?

Museum, Köln

On the territory of Germany (Heddernheim, Karlsruhe, Osterbrücken), some of the most important reliefs were found, which are defined as reliefs of the Roman Mithraism. They differ substantially from the known reliefs depicting a particular group next to the dying bull – a lion, a snake, and an upright urn. This group is known from most of the reliefs of the so-called Danubian Horsemen.

The relief from Heddernheim is the richest relief depicting the act of birth of the new sun. On it, in addition to the standard elements of other reliefs, elements are also presented that reveal the link of the Mithra reliefs to the Thracian world.

In the top right corner, there are the tree of life and the snake from the Thracian Horseman relief, the snake as Sabazios' spirit.

CIMRM 1083

Mithra, the Heddernheim relief

Under the bull one can see the famous group from the reliefs of the Danubian Horsemen – a lion, a snake and an upright vessel (crater). This group of the grievous lion and snake standing by the funeral urn has been reproduced on a big number of the reliefs.

The presence of the lion, the snake and the crater on Mithraic reliefs cannot be explained and grounded by the concepts of Mithraism as a Persian one; there is

striking … silence on this issue. The snake (the symbol of birth, of Zagreus) and the lion (Dionysus) obviously grieve and mourn for the bull, and the upright urn symbolises death. However, the Sabazios' spirit, the snake, is alive and it laments the ash in the urn. Let us remind – according to Herodotus, the Thracians believed in immortality. *A. Fol's* analysis adds – in immortality of the soul.[41] Immortalisation through the immortal spirit, the spirit of life.

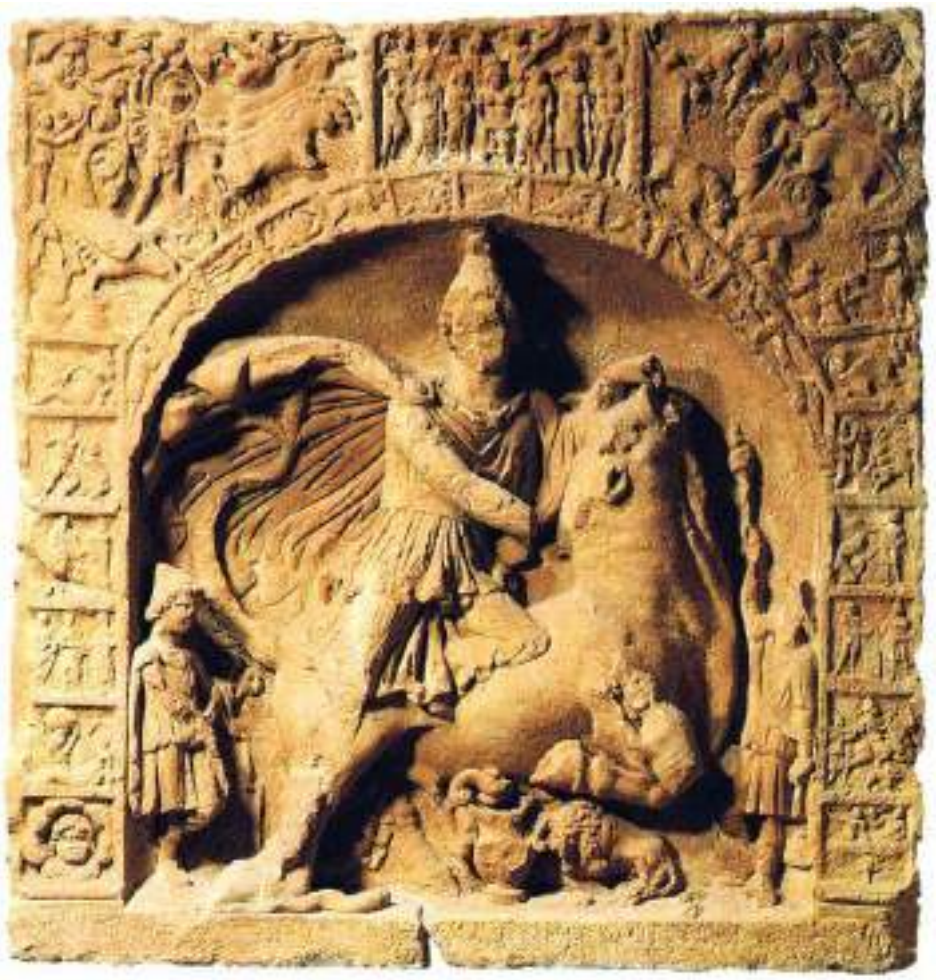
CIMRM 1283

A relief from Karlsruhe

At the bottom of the Karlsruhe relief, there are again the mourning Lion and Snake with the upright crater. The image to the left shows an enlarged section of the relief, which presents a Thracian scene described by Herodotus[42]: "*…when there is thunder and lightning these same Thracians shoot arrows skyward as a threat to the god, believing in no other god but their own*"[43].

On the left of this relief, and of many other reliefs, a stout man's figure is shown recumbent. The Thracologists define him as the resting Heracles – an element that can be found on many Thracian reliefs. Heracles is always shown close to Mithra, sometime with a weapon.

The next relief is from Osterbrücken, remarkable with the depicted scenes; the lion and the snake are also there.

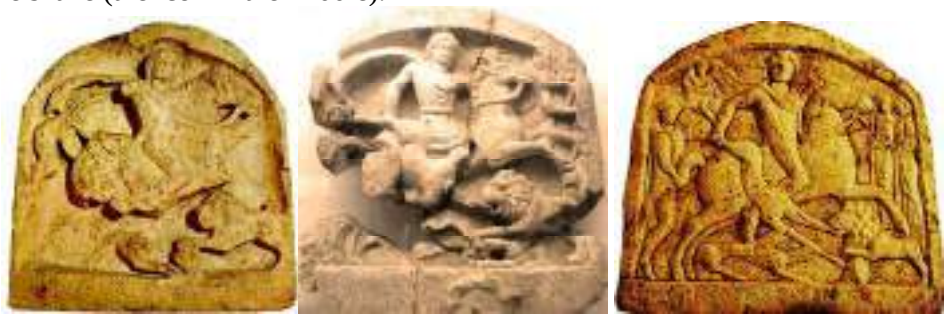


CIMRM 1292-1293

One of the scenes repeats a theme from the votive plates of the Thracian Horseman – the horseman, the lion and the servant behind him.

The lion and the snake are an element, which can be often found in Thracian iconography. As with the Mithra reliefs, the scenes depict sacrifice in front of a sacrificial altar in a cave, symbolised by the vault above the horseman. Thrace is famous with the vault temples situated under hillocks, which probably served for sacrifices, too. The images of Mithra are a specific thematic continuation of the reliefs of the Thracian horseman, related particularly to the birth of the new sun.

The Mithraeums were built by the water sources, often marked by human figures holding a vessel with water flowing out of it. The Thracian horseman often presents a gift to the lion, with its paw laid on an urn with water flowing out of it, the symbol of the spring, near which the sanctuary is situated. The gift is presented in honour of both Dionysus, emphasized by the lion, or of their spirit, symbolised by the snake (the icon in the middle).



The reliefs of the type of the so-called Danubian Horsemen, reflecting scenes of initialisation, also repeat elements both from the Thracian Horsemen and from the reliefs of Sabazios.

A relief of the Danubian Horsemen type

In the bottom, there are again the lion, the snake and the funeral urn, symbolically mourning for the kid (Zagreus) who entered adolescence (Dionysus); or the adolescent (Dionysus) who entered the adult age (Sabazios).

Mithraeums

According to Jonas Bjørnebye[44]: "Mithraists never used the word Mithraeum, as far as we know, the preferred words were speleum or antrum (a cave), crypta (an underground passage or corridor), fanum (a sacred place) or even templum (a temple or a sacred area)". Probably in a similar way during that time *the word mithraism was not used either,* it was coined later.

The Mithraeums were built in most cases under the ground with a vault ceiling resembling a cave. At one end, a bas-relief was placed or the sculpture group "Mithra is killing the bull". In many cases, above the figure, there are openings in the ceiling, made so that the daylight would fall on the composition. Research has been carried out about some temples, for which it is claimed that this happens on the day of the winter and summer solstice[45]. This fact is touched upon in the reliefs of Mithra – over the cave, there are usually two openings, through which the sun and the moon are seen in such a way that they illuminate the scene on a certain date during the day and the night.

CIMRM 229

Caesarea Maritima, Israel

There is a path or a passage leading to the composition. The mentioned places represent buildings for consecration and feasts – along the two sides of the passage there stood the initiated persons in front of whom dishes were served. The majority of the premises are under the ground.

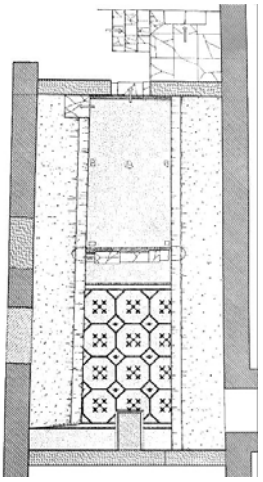
Mithraeums, restorations

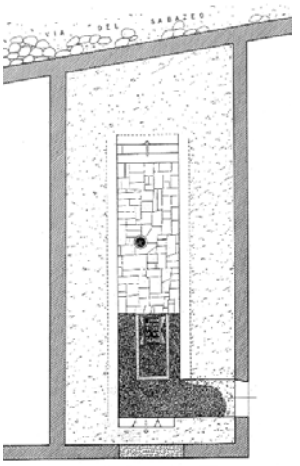
Below are the figures from the Mithraeum in San Clemente, Italy. Along with the scene of the bull slaughtering, there are also a relief of a snake, the figure of Mithra coming to birth and also the sculpture of the Roman Sol.

CIMRM 339-340 CIMRM 344 CIMRM 343

Sculpture compositions at the Mithraeum in San Clemente, Sol is along with Mithra.

A relief or a sculpture of Sol were found also in other Mithraeums, as well as inscriptions with the name of Sabazios and elements of the rites of Sabazios. This fact shows that the Mithraeums, as they are called nowadays, are not specifically temples of Mithra but temples of the Sun, ritual temples, in which the New Sun or the New Year were seen with particular rituals and procedures that also included Mithra in some of the scenes. The following materials support this statement.





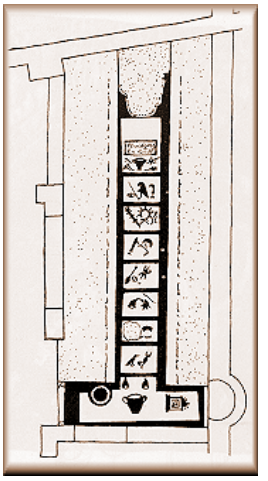


Fig. 1 Fig. 2 Fig. 3

Figures 1, 2 and 3 show three buildings, all of them situated in Ostia, Italy. The common idea is obvious – elongated design with an alley (passage) in the middle, covered with mosaics with images or an inscription and higher edges at the sides.

The first structure is called Mithraeum because an inscription was found there including the phrase DEO INVICTO MITHRAE:

(DEO INVICTO MITHRAE DIOCLES OB HONOREMC).

The second structure is called Sabazium because there is an inscription in it that mentions Sabazios.

(L.AEMILIV[s ---] ‹F=E›VSC(us) EX IMPERIO IOV IS SABAZI VOTVM FECIT[46])

On the third structure, there is no inscription but *it is also called Mithraeum* despite the images, the majority of which correspond to the Sabazios iconography – the messenger crow, the snake. Therefore the question of which god the Mithraeums were dedicated to – Sol, Sabazios or Mithra – is meaningless. Sol, Sabazios and Mithra are just an element of these rituals.

The horned snake of Sabazios at the Ostia Mithraeum.

The snake, the symbol of Sabazios, is found on each relief of Mithra. As it is likely that the cult to Sabazios penetrated Rome significantly earlier than Rome's ally – Pergamon, or after the conquest of Macedonia and the west Balkans, then the temples, which are called Mithraeums nowadays, are probably dated from an earlier period than currently accepted.

The people writing about Mithra omit, intentionally or not, a well-known aspect – Herodotus' description about how and in what temples the Persians performed sacrifices. "*The customs which I know the Persians to observe are the following: they have no images of the gods, no temples nor altars []. This way they offer sacrifice to Zeus (the god, author's remark) on the mountain tops and call Zeus "the heavenly vault". But the man who wishes to sacrifice brings his victim to a spot of ground which is pure from pollution, and there calls upon the name of the god to whom he intends to offer. It is usual to have the turban encircled with a wreath, most commonly of myrtle."*[47]

From the above it is clear that the Persians performed sacrifice not in a cave, under the ground, but on the mountain tops, close to the heavenly vault; the figure performing the sacrifice on the Mithra reliefs is not wearing a turban and is without myrtle branches. This fact is a serious argument against the thesis that the so-called Roman Mithraism was brought from Persia.

As a rule, the Mithraeum temples have no fixed orientation.

Mithra's Banquet

Some of the scenes on the Mithra reliefs are called *a Mithra's Banquet* and they reflect the festive celebrations. Masked participants played rituals, among which is the slaughtering of the bull. The relief from Dalmatia shows masked participants such as the crow, the lion, the snake and the bull in front of the old and the new Sun, with hands raised in greeting. The table is covered with the bull's hide, its head is also there. On the tripod in front of them, small loafs of bread are placed with a cross engraved on them, similarly to the loaves from Sabazios' hand.

CIMRM 1896

Saint Augustine (354–430) describes the scene as follows: "Some are flapping with wings like birds, imitating the caw of the crow, others are snarling like lions"[48].

On the following scenes, there are the participants in the festivities – they bring sacrificial gifts to the table where Mithra and Sol are seated.

The reproduction reveals an interesting detail – at the celebrations, in addition to the new sun, there is also the old one – on the first scene the new sun is reaching to the crown of the old one, the new sun is by the table next to the sun with the crown passing out. The two greet the participants.

On the first three reliefs of the ones shown below, the participants raise a toast after the sacrifice, the bull's hide is beneath them. On the first relief, the horned snake is in front of the sacrificial altar, on the second relief, in addition to the bull's hide, there is a bunch of grapes placed on the tripod table, on the last three reliefs, the sun has taken off its crown. The grapes, the taken off crown and gown probably symbolise the role of the "old sun" – fertility that has gone away.

CIMRM 641

Lopodunum/Ladenburg, Germany.

Mithreum of Rirgel

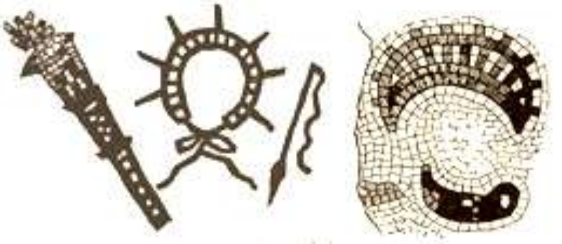
CIMRM 1083

Again a banquet over the killed bull; on both scenes the old sun has taken off its crown.

Probably in the Roman legions consisting of numerous tribes, various religions were mixed, however the birth of the new sun in the Roman Empire was a common holiday with common iconography – the sacrifice of the bull.

Around some reliefs, additional details and scenes are shown, which clearly show that these are scenes of a religious ritual recreating the birth of the new sun or the seeing of the New Year. The main characters in this ritual are the person performing the sacrifice and the one in the role of the sun. On the first image, the performer of the old sun, being the god of fertility, offers grapes to Mithra. I will remind that even nowadays in Portugal and Spain, at midnight of the New Year, under the tolling of the bells, twelve grape berries should be eaten and this custom has been imported by the Spaniards from Cuba. Grapes are offered at the table also in some regions of Bulgaria.

CIMRM 1083


Mithreum Ostia

What is noticeable here is not the grape berry in the hands of Sol but the fact that Sol is not wearing a sun crown: the crown is on the wall behind the two, i.e. it is a theatrical property. This fact confirms the assertion that it is a matter of a performance during a celebration. The objects to the right are images of a torch, a lash and a sun's crown depicted in the "Ostia Mithraeum", the theatrical property of the performance. On the relief below, a part of the relief from the Heddernheim "Mithraeum", an expressive scene is depicted, which presents a part of this performance. The main protagonist is the priest who is killing the bull.

Heddernheim CIMRM 1083

The first figure of the composition is repeated many times on stone carvings, which the "Mithraists" name "Mithra's birth from a stone". In this case, it is visible that this is a tree. Later on, we will see that the problem *a tree or a stone* actually exists and we will try to understand which is the original element and which is the transferred one.

The second scene of the Heddernheim relief shows Mithra carrying the bull. The bull is no longer a god, it is only a body, its spirit in the image of a snake returns, being depicted also on the reliefs of the Thracian Horseman – on the tree of life, on the tree of the souls, the symbol of the Holy Spirit.

The third scene shows how Mithra puts the crown on the head of the person who will play the role of the "new sun" and the putting on the gown.

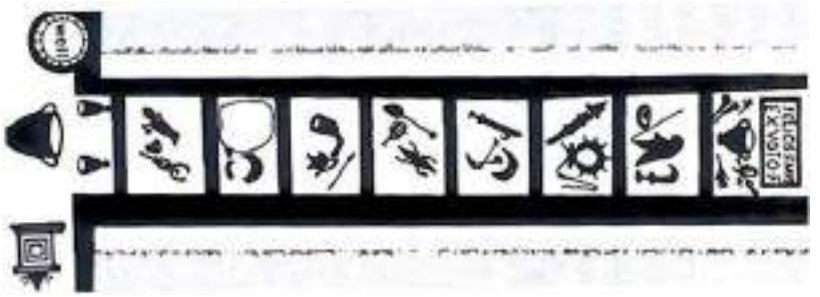
On the last scene Mithra has taken off the crown and the sun gown from the person performing the role of the "old sun" and greets him.

I am tempted to make a comment – it is obvious how the historians have invented the *Mithraism* religion out of a New Year's ritual or theatre performance, accompanied by the New Year's banquet, where this religion even rivals the originating Christianity.

Usually, after this scene, another one follows, in which the sun, the priest and the messenger with a caduceus, the messenger's staff, start with the chariot to announce the birth of the new sun.

On other reliefs, the ritual scenes of dedication before and after the ceremony are shown.

Elements from the theatrical property of the celebrations – the messenger crow, the messenger's caduceus, a bull's leg, a crater and a snake.



A Mithraeum with an image of the ceremony property, which includes the urn, is depicted twice – in the beginning and in the end.

The iconography of the Roma Mithraism originated unexpectedly as a ready concept, brought from the outside. The archaeology does not support in any way the "import" of the Mithraic iconography from the Eastern lands. The technology of the Roman empire and the Balkan legions of warriors dislocated to the West have created villages and towns, in which they not only lived but also celebrated the coming of the New Sun (New Year), *created conditions* for manifestation of iconography with the main image of a sacrifice of a bull in a cave, the death of Sabazios.

The majority of the Mithraeums are underground temples. While the Mithra-societies themselves are considered secret societies. A big part of the Thracian temples in the Balkans are under tumuli or cave sanctuaries. The reliefs of the Thracian Horseman reflect this fact through the arches they show; as well as the Roman Mithraic reliefs. The Thracian Zalmoxis preaches his belief in immortality of the soul among his table-companions through initiation feasts at special premises (Zalmoxis "made a hall, where he entertained and fed the leaders among his countrymen"[49]; the feast halls built by the Thracian rulers Cotys, Dromichaetes, Diegylis were called andreons, estiatorions). The Orphics also preach their belief among wealthy citizens at specially organised feasts. Both societies – the followers of Zalmoxis in Thrace and those of the Roman Mithraism – are secret societies of initiated people. Both of them excluded women. The feast of the initiated people is equally iconic for the Thracian religions and for Mithraism.

The Birth of Mithra

The birth of Mithra presented here and the following images show that we are not talking about a stone but about a tree, which, according to Vermaseren[50] is a cypress, i.e. an evergreen tree, a symbol of the tree of life. On CIMRM 344, the tree even resembles a fir-cone. Each branch of the tree is presented with a central midrib (line) and lateral panels, similarly to the cypress branches, of course – stylised.

Köln, Germany.

CIMRM 344

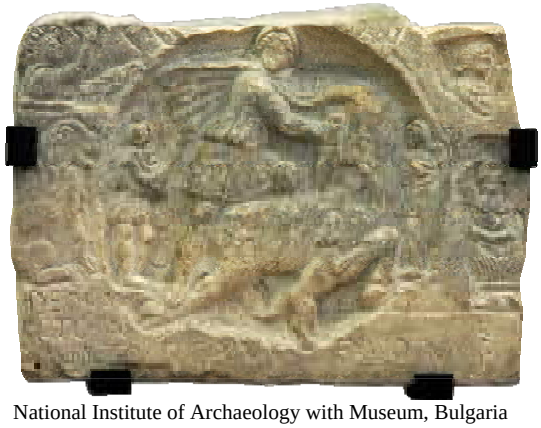
Heidelberg, Germany

Other examples could also be shown but even here the artistic notion of a tree crown is clearly visible, but not of a rock.

The person born from the tree is holding a knife in one hand and a torch in the other, which shows that this is the one who offers a sacrifice, Mithra. What does this symbolism mean – the birth of the bull-slayer from a tree, a symbol of the tree of life?

We can suggest that taking the life of a god in a religious ceremony may be performed only by a god. The green tree is a symbol of the tree of life, i.e. of the spirit of life, of which the god's immortal soul is part. Mithra is a materialised spirit born by god.

Very often on the tree, along with Mithra, there can be seen also the symbol of Zagreus, Dionysus, Sabazios, *of their spirit,* the snake coiled around the tree of life as it is depicted on the reliefs of the Thracian Horseman. This is also so on the figure to the right (from the Archaeological Museum, Bulgaria), shown below, as well as on the three sculptures from the museums in Ptuj, Slovenia, Sarmizegetusa Dacia, Bad Deutsch-Altenburg, Austria, which supports the statement that the god was born from the tree of life; in iconography, there is no recurring symbol of a snake coiled around a stone.



National Institute of Archaeology with Museum, Bulgaria

Left – the mourning lion, right – Mithra is born from the wood with a snake coiled around it[51]. The inscription says: "The holy, invincible god…."

CIMRM 1492-1493

CIMRM 1687

CIMRM 2134

"Mithra" from the tree of life, with a snake coiled around it

CIMRM 1240

CIMRM 1991

CIMRM 1756

At the same time, there are also reliefs, which clearly show that Mithra is born from a rock. On the first relief from the Mithraeum in Ptuj, the inscription says "Happily born from a rock", although the rock was shaped like leaves or branches of a cypress. On the second relief, also from Ptuj, Mithra is born from a rock. On the last relief from Heddernheim, both the workmanship and the inscription accentuate on the birth from a rock. Here Mithra himself is called "the invincible god": DEO IN MI, P GNERICEM (the invincible god Mithra, born from a rock).

Ptuj, Slovenia

CIMRM 1593-1594

Heddernheim

The birth from a rock is supported also by the following two sculptures.

S. Stefano Rotondo, Rome

CIMRM 353

The inscription under the first sculpture affirms – "born from the rock" – Petram genetricem.

It appears that in the religious domain, there exist two controversial ideas about the birth of the bull-slayer – born from a tree or born from a stone. How can these two facts be explained?

In my opinion, this ambiguity shows that the concept of "born from a tree" was transformed into "born from a rock". Probably, the reason is assimilation of the idea of "Mithra, the bull-slayer" by "Mithra, the soldier". The iconography of Mithraism was developed in the military environment of the Roman legions; Mithra was gradually identified with a soldier. An invincible soldier cannot be born from a tree, the birth from a rock corresponds to the soldier power and strength. There is a text that relates Mithra to a rock but obviously it does not refer to "this Mithra" and definitely does not show the birth of Mithra from a rock: "Klaus retells the story of how Mithra spilled his seed onto a rock, and the stone gave birth to a son, named Diorphos, who, worsted and killed in a duel by Ares, was turned into the mountain of the same name not far from the Armenian river Araxes"[52].

After all, probably a folk tradition reflecting the outlook on life in the modern Roman time turned into a military cult where Mithra was the invincible god. The Mithra reliefs – a ritual carved and frozen on a stone.

In the iconography we know, Mithraism is the result (according to Cumont) of the layers of concepts over the Persian zoroastrianism, derived from the "uncultured region of Pontus that imparted its imagery". He was probably right – from his point of view. But who is the "uncultured" one? The one who creates images or the one who cannot understand them and ascribe them to another religion? This concept is persistently supported nowadays even by the researches of the Thracian areal who obviously know zoroastrianism better than the Balkan spiritual world. I understand them, the situation requires that one sells what is well advertised today and brings benefits.

The reincarnations of the Sun God

The first stele (CIMRM 822-823) is from the Walbrook Mithraeum, London, Britain. The second one is from Bulgaria, the Archaeological Museum, Varna. The compositions are identical and they repeat the same motif – the celebration of Dionysus. The images probably come from the same workshop.

CIMRM 822-823

Archaeological Museum, Varna

Dionysus with his symbols – the snake and the young lion

At first sight, Dionysus' presence is unwonted in a Mithraeum. However, in the light of the above-said – the Mithraeums, the temples of the sun – this fact has a logical explanation.

The stele of Modena is described as an image of the deity Phanes. This would be so if we considered the symbol of "the birth from an egg" the reserved mark for a god, which is obviously not the case, but rather it also means the start of counting the time, which cannot be a monopoly. Thematically, such sculptures are found mainly in Mithraeums and probably it is also from a Mithraeum. This stele is the transition to the so-called sculptures of Leontocephali – a human body with a lion's head from various Mithraeums.

The stele, however, is full of the Dionysus-Sabazios symbolism. There are rays coming out of the god's head, the moon is on his shoulders. The snake, the goat, the lion and the bull are here – the temporal symbols of Dionysus and Sabazios. Obviously, this is a about an annual cycle (the meaning of the zodiac

signs around the image), about the cyclic sun god and the symbols of its development from birth till death.

CIMRM 695-696

The stele of Modena

The god is portrayed at an age in the sign of the Aries, the time of Great Dionysian celebrations. Probably this is a generalised image, on the relief the handsome Dionysus can be seen, however, his feet in the fire of time are now hooves (Plutarch – "Come to us with a bull's hoof"[53]). We can say that the arrow represents a certain moment of the annual cycle, expressed through the symbols describing also Zagreus, Dionysus, Sabazios.

The fir-cone is missing from Dionysus' staff but it is also missing from Sabazios' staff, which emphasizes once again the transition from Dionysus to Sabazios. The symbol of a snake coiled around Dionysus and around the Spirit of life (the Tree) of the Thracian Horseman is not only a symbol of the God's soul but is also a defender, guardian, heros, cherubim[54] of the body.

I would consider the below images as a next stage, a late timely projection of the image of Dionysus from the stele of Modena, their development and continuation.

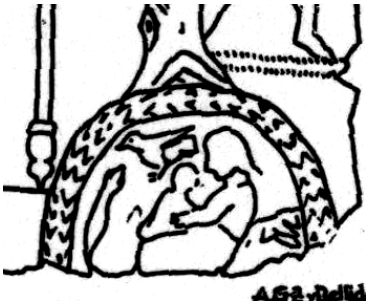
CIMRM 545

Bordeaux, France.

Time is ruthless, it has its very cruel side. The old age distorts Dyonisus' features, he becomes the cruel god who locked his successor in the dungeon. For this reason, the god is portrayed with cruel features and often holds a key in his hands. The image is an illustration, a personification of "the other Sabazios", "the late Sabazios"... who must be killed.

What a successor are we talking about? The images of the mother from the cave where she is tied with ropes clarify the concept presented below.

The "enchained" mother from the sculptures of Sabazios' hands



The mother with the infant in the cave from Sabazios' relief of Ampurias;
A Mithra relief, the mother in the cave just before delivery.

Probably the story, carved on stone and bronze, can be retold in a couple of words and its representation in the folklore would sound like this: "The great spirit, the God, spiritualised the Earth and the Sky but darkness prevailed. Then the "union between the Earth and the Sky has given birth to Zagreus, the horned child, the Sun, Zagreus. The titans tore the child Zagreus to pieces but the Sky brought him back to life and Dionysus was born who was gradually transformed in Sabazios over the time. Sabazios would grow up rich and generous but at the end of his days he grew weaker, time turned him into an old, tired man and the Earth fell in the grip of cold. Sabazios hid in the cave, the Mother was also there, expecting her baby – the new sun. Sabazios knew – he will die when the baby is born. Sabazios tied the mother with thick ropes. Then God was enraged and it gave birth to the Invincible. The hero killed Sabazios in the cave and set the mother free. So, this story was repeated again and again every year, from time immemorial till nowadays."

Of course, this presentation has some naivety and meanness but it also has some truth in it. On many of "Sabazios' hands", the mother giving birth is "enchained", tied and awaiting the saviour. The raven is next to her and it will spread the news of the birth of the new sun.

Mithra from Persia was a guarantor of the contracts, agreements and justice. Sabazios broke the contract and was killed. By Mithra. And yet, next to Mithra's knife, the inscription remains – "Glory and honour to Sabazios".

Rome, Mithra, Sabazios

According to the historians, the beginning of the development of the so-called Roman Mithraism in Europe with the famous Mithra iconography was at the end of the 1st century AD, and it is manifested with particular strength during the 2nd century, and to a certain extent in the 3rd century. This coincides with the time of Emperor Aurelian (270-275) who decided to strengthen the positions of the Roman SOL, an important deity in the Roman Pantheon. Aurelian built a big temple of the sun SOL at the Field of Mars. God Mars was the Roman god of war and was the second important Roman god after Jupiter. Initially, he was the god of fertility,

harvest, cattle and frontiers, as well as defender of the cattle, fields, borders and farmers. (In fact, this is how the Persian Mithra started, too – a god of fields, cattle, frontiers and contracts). During the expansion of the Roman Empire, Mars was connected with battlers and turned into a god of equal significance as god Ares from the Thracian mythology[55].

The tradition was established to celebrate the Roman Sol as a state cult every four years, on the day of god's birth – 25 December. A college of pontiffs of the Sun was created, too, nominated among the senators. Aurelian's idea was to create a single monotheistic religion, which should unite the peoples of the Empire (Antiochus' idea) under the sign of the Invincible Sun, probably due to the fact that the sun was actually a religion of many Roman peoples and was honoured by them, although in a different way.

Aurelian's idea about the Invincible Sun God,
he called himself a God (Sun)

The sun was depicted on coins with the inscription "Lord of the Roman Empire" (SOL DOMINVS IMPERI ROMANI). The cult was official for the legionaries and the sun was depicted on their standards. So, if it had not been a military cult, Aurelian was pushing it in this direction. Probably in the trend outlined by the established attitude toward Mithra – the god in the Roman legions.

Shields of Roman legions with images of the sun

The nature of the new imperial religion of Aurelian becomes clear even only from the shown coin – the Roman god Sol is a warrior, the conquered people are in his feet. It is not by chance that Emperor Aurelius erected a pantheon of the sun god at the Field of Mars.

It could be asserted, quite reliably, that a new military cult toward Mithra was created, a cult of the legions, in which the bull killer is the warrior, the invincible god Mithra. So during Aurelian's time, the model warrior is no longer Mithra alone but also his adept Sol. SOL becomes INVICTO, THE INVINCIBLE.

Probably, during that time, Sol became *the God of Mithra* – DEO SOL INVICTO MITHRAE, the re-utilisation of the old monuments had started. On the relief from the Villa Borghese, a graffito is added under Mithra – DEO SOL INVICTO MITRHE. The inscription above the bull was subsequently added on the sculpture from Alba Iulia, Sibiu Museum, Romania – D.S.I.M. – DEO SOL INVICTO MITHRAE.

CIMRM 1935

The inscription DEO SOLI INVICTO MITHRAE means "the invincible sun god Mithra", if translated literally. MITHRAE - genitive, singular, meaning possession – inflection ***ae***. The stem is MITHRA, written on a pedestal of Mithra CIMRM 1942. The variants of the name Mithra in the inscriptions according to CIMRM are mainly Mithrae or only rarely Mitrhe:

CIMRM 76 Mithrae
CIMRM 436 Mithrae
CIMRM 660 Mitrhae
CIMRM 841 Mytrae
CIMRM 848 Mithrae
CIMRM 1242 Mitrae

How should the "possession" or "appropriation" – "Mithrae"– be interpreted? As a patronage? It is true that Mithra kills the bull and "sets the new sun free" but is this a reason to refer to it as Mithra's (Mithrae)? Or is this a way of elevation through getting closer to the idol warrior, identical to Mars' or "belonging to the god of war, Mars"? Or this is just an exclamation from the ceremonies of killing the bull – the INVINCIBLE SUN – BELONGING TO THE INVINCIBLE MITHRA. So, the ceremony would begin. Which is more likely.

There is no explicit inscription stating that Mithra is "the sun god". There is no such indication in the Greek inscriptions, either.

On the majority of the reliefs, there are no inscriptions; there are only few reliefs, which have Mithra's name written on them, mainly in the version of: DEO SOLI INVICTO MITHRAE or SOLI INVICTO DEO.

CIMRM 546-547

Here, the inscription SOLI INVICTO DEO is clear, the relief is dedicated to Sol, the Roman sun god that became the invincible sun god.

The inscription on the relief from Bulgaria (National Institute of Archaeology with Museum, p. 43) DEO SAMCTO INVICTO means "the holy, invincible god".

CIMRM 435-436

The relief features the standard inscription DEO SOLI INVICTO MITHRAE.

The statements of some historians show that there are numerous Mithra monuments known but the monuments of Sabazios in Rome are just few. The reason is that out of the several inscriptions with the name of Mithra, the historians build the so-called Mithraism without noticing Sabazios behind them. However, he was mentioned there – under the name of SOL. But it is not only the historians who exaggerated Mithra's role at the expense of the sun god by creating the idea of Mithraism; this was also done by the commanders of the Roman legions who probably created the invincible Mithra out of the ritual Mithra.

The warrior god cannot be born from a tree – therefore Mithra was said to be born from a rock.

Sabazios and Pergamon, Thrace, Macedonia

Cumont and other authors see the origin of the Roman iconography in Pergamon. According to Cumont, the relief of the bull slaughtering is a scene that depicts all characteristics of the Diadochian epoch, the original of all the works of this type has been provided *by an artist of Pergamon*"[56]; "this famous artistic group was based on an Attic original by an artist of Pergamon in the second century B.C. The original of the relief – an ornament in the balustrade of the temple of Athena – Nike on the Acropolis – the well-known figure of Victory sacrificing a bull[57]; "at first identified with the Sun-god Helios by the Greeks, the syncretic Mithra-Helios was transformed into the figure Mithras *during the 2nd century BC, probably at Pergamon.*"[58]; „*and it was at Pergamon, in the 2nd BC*, that Greek sculptors started to produce bas-relief imagery of Mithra Taurocthonos, 'Mithra the bull-slayer'"[59].

Pergamon, and of course, Greece.

Pergamon has its merit in the development of the cult to Sabazios in Asia Minor. However, Pergamon is just one of the units constituting this cult, its roots are deeper in time.

In 134 BC, the King of Pergamon, Attalus, introduced the cult to Sabazios as an official cult. The pre-history of this act is the following.

Lysimachus, a bodyguard, general and military commander of Alexander the Great, following Alexander's death, as of year 284 BC, ruled over Thrace, the present-day Bulgarian Black sea coast, Macedonia, Thessaly, the coast of Sea of Marmara and present-day Northern Anatolia. According to the available information by the ancient authors in Tirizis at Kaliakra, Thrace and Pergamon, Asia Minor, Lysimachus built fortresses, in which he kept the Darius' treasures plundered from Persepolis. Probably the guard of the fortress and the treasury was assigned to a trusted garrison of Macedonians or Thracians. Lysimachus was killed in 281 BC. Three years earlier, in 284, Pergamon was declared an independent Kingdom ruled by Philetaerus. Philetaerus' father was a Macedonian and his mother was a Pontian. Philetaerus was probably supported by the local garrison of the fortress, it is likely that a Balkan colony already existed there. Thanks to its treasures, Pergamon became a major cultural centre with numerous temples. The Temple of Zeus with images of the War of the Titans, of Aphrodite, Gaia, Hekate, Helios and many others, can be found nowadays at the Pergamon Museum, Berlin. It is due to its wealth that Pergamon ruled over a considerable part of Asia Minor. The second largest library in the ancient world – after the one in Alexandria.

The explanation why the cult to the sun, the cult to Sabazios became a state religion in the Pergamon Kingdom is probably contained in the composition of the Pergamon garrison – Thracians and Macedonians. Macrobius[60] writes that in Thrace the Sun is called Sabazios and the Thracians celebrate him with magnificent piety: "*We know that in Thrace the sun is considered also Liber. The Thracians call it*

Sabazios and honoured it solemnly, as it is written by Alexander Polyhistor. A temple on the Zilmissos hill is dedicated to it, a round temple with its roof having an opening in the middle. The round shape of the temple shows the nature of this star. The light enters through the roof top and this shows that the sun illuminates everything with its rays that it emits from the top of the sky and that its illumination reveals everything...".

The inscription on the plate shown below[61], found ten years ago at the Greek-Macedonian border, known as a stele from Edessa, dated from the beginning of the ninth century BC, also shows that the Macedonians offered sacrifice to the "supreme god Sabazios" and it reads:

"Perdiccas, son of Argaeus (□ργα□ος) leading his Makestes (Macedons), having reached the Acropolis of Edessa coming from upper Illyria, offered sacrifice to uppermost (god) Sabazios [Sabazion]. Afterwards, when he conquered entire Midas country, being outraged with foreign Greeks who were charged for intrigues, exterminated them immediately while releasing indigenous Brigians to wander away, because both these people spoke different languages. Since then being elder sovereign of Brigea enjoyed the profits of this very ancient city (Edessa) renaming it to Aigai while repelling fugitives to return with exception of captives. This marble chronicle was chiselled in Greek language by Dredas son of Gordios, in memory of a sorrowful remembrance".

Herodotus writes: "According to the Macedonian account, the Phrygians, during the time that they had their abode in Europe and dwelt with them in Macedonia, bore the name of Brigians. But on their removal to Asia they changed their designation to Phrygians at the same time with their dwelling-place."[62]

Here we could ask ourselves whether these wondering Brigians who lived among Macedons and Thracians and were chased away by the Macedons created the Anatolian Phrygia of the kings Midas and Gordias? Did these Brigians leave there the inscription *Sabaz, the son of Cybele,* due to which Sabazios is called a Thracian-Phrygian god? The capital of Phrygia was the town of Gordium, conquered six centuries later again by a Macedonian king, Alexander, after he sliced the knot made by the Phrygian king Gordias in front of the temple of Zeus.

In 370 BC, the ruler of Lidia (a part of Persia at that time) prohibited the priests to take part in the festivities in honour of Sabazios, at which there were fire dances and the priests carried something in their hands, because the ritual desecrated the cult to Ahura Mazda whose main element was the admiration of fire.

Strabo (68 BC – 24 AD) says that the Phrygian Cybele (one of the Mother's names) "is Sabazios' mother in a certain respect"; and also that the priestesses at the temple of Artemis in Castabala, the Tauros Mountain, dance over fire.

4 April 204 BC – Rome "buys" the cult of the Phrygian goddess Cybele.

139 BC – the praetor of Rome expels the Chaldeans because they corrupted the Roman morals with the cult to Jupiter Sabazios that they practised and the next year, according to Titus Livius, Rome introduced the cult to Sabazios in Rome.

135–134 BC – according to the inscription from Pergamon, the King of Pergamon, Attalus, officially introduced the cult to Sabazios in the kingdom brought by his mother, Queen Stratonice from Cappadocia[63]. Attalus was called "bull's son", "wearing bull's horns"[64].

133 BC – the Asia Minor Kingdom of Pergamon voluntarily joined the Roman Empire. From this moment, for more than two hundred and fifty years until the origination of the Roman Mithraism, temples would be built in Rome and the Empire, reliefs would be made with the cult to Sabazios, and they would be usually attended by priests from the temples, from which the cult was "imported" (Asia Minor, the Balkans).

* * *

Christianity of the later years speaks about the actual meaning of the symbols of the lion and the snake. They become one of the major objects of criticism and contradiction. On the shown mural painting from Ravenna, the Archbishop's Chapel, 5th century AD, the Eternal God, Jesus Christ, is a winner who has set his foot on the snake and the lion. Jesus is holding in his hand a book with the inscription: "I am the Road, also the Truth, also the Life". The only one. The mural painting is from the time when it was still remembered well who the lion and the snake were.

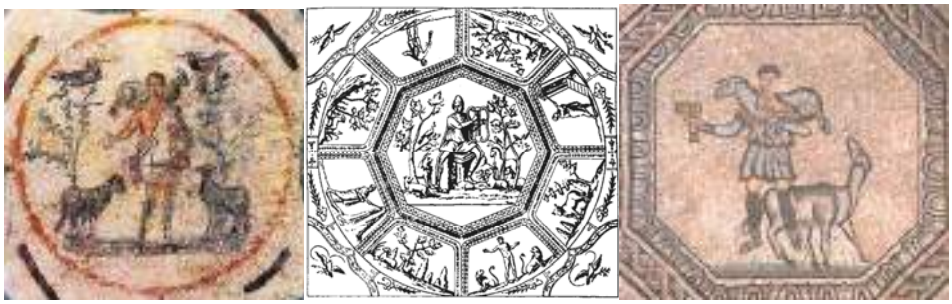
Mosaics, Ravenna, St. Andrew Chapel, 4th-5th century AD

Even in the 12th century, the lion and the snake and the image of the sun – the cock, are the main enemies of Christianity – see the sculpture group in front of the city-hall of Munich.

The attempt of Emperor Aurelius to unite the various cults toward the sun is an attempt at creating a monotheistic religion that serves the empire. A contrary reaction probably followed as only 36 years later the Edict of Toleration, or the so-called Edict of Serdica, of the Roman emperor Galerius, was proclaimed, issued on his behalf and on behalf of his co-rulers, the Augusti Constantine and Licinius, in Serdica on 30 April 311. The edict unconditionally gave Christianity the status of a

"legal religion" (religio licita), a worship recognized and accepted by the Roman Empire. The First Council of Nicaea in 325, convened by Emperor Constantine I who was born in Naissos (present-day Nis, Serbia), finally gave way to Christianity establishing the Creed and the Symbol of Faith. However, the concept of the old holy trinity – Holy Spirit, Father and Holy Mother – still existed in people's minds and for this reason the necessary compromise brought to the trinity, which is hard to assimilate even nowadays: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Of course, not everybody accepted the image of the newly created Son – Christ. Probably this is the reason why in the temples in the Roman catacombs *the new son* appeared, whom the believers depicted as Orpheus, the good shepherd.



Christian images of "the good shepherd" in the catacombs Priscilla and Domitilla, Rome: The Patriarch's basilica of Santa Maria Assunta, Aquileia

After all, what do the Roman Mithraistic reliefs depict? Nothing else but nativity.Icons of the nativity, the birth of the New sun. Some of them are accompanied by additional artistic images of ritual scenes; of domestic scenes with activities related to the festivity. We could infer that the reliefs of the cult to the sun in the Roman empire reflect the attitude toward the sun god of various peoples in the Empire where in a situation of syncretism there existed the Roman Sol and the Balkan Sabazios with a common relief image of the death of the old sun and the birth of the new one.

Ghosts from the Past

In Rome, between the 1st and the 4th century, the Balkan-Asia-Minor concept of religious ritualism toward the sun was established with its notion of development of the annual cycle in the image of Zagreus, Dionysus, Sabazios with the same symbolic means in iconography – the images of the snake, the ram and the lion, the bull and also the images of the sky, the earth and the tree of life as the image of the Holy spirit. They are incorporated in the ideas that we call nowadays Roman Mithraism, reliefs of the Thracian Horseman, Hands of Sabazios, which have common elements:

- the action takes place in a cave;
- the snake is the personification of the soul;

- the snake and the lion in front of the funeral urn;
- the dog as an invariable companion;
- the Thracian clothes;
- the messenger crow and the cock.

Rome and its system of state have allowed for the manifestation of the Thracian spiritualism on the stone reliefs of the Thracian Horseman, Sabazios and Mithra, which have remained hidden until that time from the sight of the world however existing in the Thracian rituals, part of which are performed even nowadays in the Bulgarian lands.

The idea of the birth of the new sun is depicted in an especially beautiful way on the image on the back side of the plate of the first image of Mithra and the bull of this paper – the relief at the Louvre Museum. The relief is called by the learned *Mithra's Banquet*.

In the sky, there is a moon with its face turned aside from the scene. The bull, the image of Sabazios, the setting sun, is laid down. The new sun has come down to the people dressed in warm winter clothes, the victim bull is laid down.

The sun descends lowest on the horizon, near the people, on 22 December; on 25 December it starts ascending again. This is the time of the winter solstice when the days start getting longer and the night is gradually decreasing. It is winter time, the people wear their winter clothes. For the Bulgarians, this is the Christmas Eve, the night before Christmas. According to the ritual, one vacant seat is left at the table. After the pray, the oldest member of the family says three times: "Come down, God, to have dinner"[65]! And God would come down.

Those Bulgarian men who celebrate Christmas, the birth of the new sun, wear the same clothes – hooded cloaks (called yamurluks in Bulgarian), the same hoods and the two groups carry clubs in their hands. There identical images on the Greek vase with Orpheus – V BC[66] – the same clothes with the same horizontal strips in the pattern.

During the Dionysus holidays, the celebrations of the conception, the women would dance and carry in their hands baskets full of snakes. In 370 BC, in Lydia, at the celebrations in honour of Sabazios there were fire dances and the priests would "carry something in their hands". The same way nowadays the Bulgarian women dance over fire.

A Bulgarian woman performing the ritual described 2,500 years ago. She is carrying in her hands the icon of St. St. Constantine and Helen. Constantine who killed Sabazios forever.

The snake with a crest is depicted on the sacrificial altar on the back side of the relief at the Louvre.

The object the man holds, to the right of the sacrificial altar, is the ancient caduceus, the messenger's staff.[67] What do the three men announce? The thing that the three wise men announced – the birth of the Infant. The three priests from the relief are the three ancient wise men[68], later borrowed by the Christian religion.[69] In antiquity, the caduceus was the staff of the messenger made of olive or laurel tree, decorated with branches wreathed in the form of "8". It is identical with the traditional Bulgarian survachka (a stick of cornel-tree twigs decorated with colourful threads) used by the children in Bulgaria only on the Christmas day, the day of the winter solstice. "Surva, surva, New Year!" – the Bulgarian children wish. *Sura*[70] is a Thracian word, which means *healthy, brave, heroic.* The Indo-Iranian

word *suria* is translated as *bright, shining; heavenly body, sun*. Health to the newly-born sun!

Very often, at the top of the survachka there are strips hanging, probably imitating the fire, with which the messenger from the relief lights his caduceus to be visible during the night.

If we are to look for an ancient analogue of the Christmas tree covered with garlands, we will find it in the votive plates of the Thracian Horseman where the tree of life is wreathed by a snake.

Nowadays, we continue placing gifts under it or express our wishes as people used to do in ancient times. The star does not mean anything else but the birth of the new sun – by analogy with the images from Urartu, Assyria.

Gifts, appeals and wishes; on this Christmas tree, accidentally or not – a birth from the tree of life, similarly to Mithra's birth

The loud mummer parades in Bulgaria are a legacy of the Dionysus festivities where young people were also dressed in hides.

NOTES

[1] *John R. Hinnells*, Reflections on the bull-slaying scene in *Mithraic studies*, vol. 2, p. 292

[2] *Again there*

[3] In Rigveda,

1 Book 13, verse 46:
The Sun ..... rises, the eye of
Mithra, Varuna, Agni.

2. Book 13, Hymn 2:
35 . It (the Sun) has risen high, ... the eye of
Mithra, Varuna and Agni.

[4] http://www.columbia.edu/itc/mealac/pritchett/00routesdata/0100_0199/kanishka/kanishka.html

[5] *Ptol., Tetrabibl., II, Procl., Paraphr. in Ptol.*, p. 93.

[6] *Richard Gordon*, Interpreting Mithras in the Late Renaissance

[7] Again there

[8] Boyce, Mary; Grenet, Frantz (1975). *Zoroastrianism under Macedonian and Roman rule, Part 1*. Brill. pp. 468, 469. *ISBN 90-04-09271-4. Retrieved 2011-03-16.*

[9] *St. Jerome,* Epist. ad Laetam, 107.

[10] Mithras, the Secret GodBy*: M.J. Vermaseren*, London, 1963

[11] *Fr. Cumont*, The Mysteries of Mithra

[12] *M.J. Vermaseren,* "Nuove indagini nell'area della basilica di S. Prisca in Roma", in *Mededelingen van het Nederlands Instituut te Rome. Antiquity*, n.s., 37, 2 (1975), pp. 87-96, p.93:

[13] Corpus Inscriptionum et Monumentorum Religionis Mithriacae – CIMRM, which represents a collection of inscriptions and records related to the practising and history of Mithraism issued by the Department of Fine Arts and Literature of the Flemish Academy (1947) and compiled and supplemented by Maarten Jozef Vermaseren, was published in The Hague under this title in 1956–60.

[14] http://www.theposthole.org/sites/theposthole.org/files/downloads/posthole_41_309.pdf

[15] *Herodotus*, History, Clio, 131

[16] In Avesta:

1. Zend Avesta, part 3, Yasna 1: The Sun (rises) on swift horses, Ahura Mazda's eye, and to Mithra, the lord of provinces.

2. The Sun on horses, Ahura Mazda's eye, and to Mithra who is the lord of provinces.

3. He (Mithra), first of the heavenly gods,
reaches over Hara before the undying, swift-horsed sun. (Chapter IV 13)

[17] Two days after this date is the Bulgarian St. Dimitri's Day, which is perceived as the end of the field work.

[18] *Macrobius*, (Macrob. Saturn, I, 18, 1-11)

[19] *Диляна Ботева,* Етрополският Свети Атанас, Сабазий и светилището на бесите Архим. доц. д-р *Павел Стефанов*, Един култ на 2000 години

[20] *Александър Фол*, Тракийският Дионис, Сабазий

[21] *Paulinus A S. Bartolomaeo,* The samscrdamic language, p. 115. Thanking „Esteban von Chukarski" for the address:

https://books.google.bg/books?id=6I65BtbOpe4C&pg=PA115&lpg=PA115&dq=%E2%80%9CNama+Sebesio&source=bl&ots=CfFvt4S0Oj&sig=enD0bqQDKgK_dkSWdREIaQB8TSQ&hl=bg&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwjov8iMjbTKAhXCeQ8KHeIODU4Q6AEIVDAI#v=onepage&q=%E2%80%9CNama%20Sebesio&f=false ; *nama* is a word used to this day in India as *namaste*.

[22] Bronze bust of god Sabazios, 2nd-century CE. Musei Vaticani, temporary exhibition (aug 2013) in Colosseum, Rome, Italyhttps://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Bronze_busts_in_Italy#/media/File:Sabazios_Colosseum_Rome_Italy.jpg,

[23] In the Scholia to the Iliad, XIII, 705, the so-called fragment 523 of Tereus by Sophocles is quoted.

[24] *Nonnus, Nonn*, Dion, VI, 155–223

[25] *Вл. Георгиев*, Тракийският език, 60; Дуриданов, Езикът на траките,70, 81.

[26] Triumph of Dionysos, Sarcophagus, New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art . 260–270 Phrygian marble,

[27] Sacred baskets with sacred snakes from Pergamon, Asia Minor, from II BC; from the period when the King of Pergamon, Attalus III, officially introduced the cult to Sabazios in the Kingdom (inscription CCIS II 2755).

[28] Sacred baskets with sacred snakes from Pergamon, Asia Minor, from II BC; from the period when the King of Pergamon, Attalus III, officially introduced the cult to Sabazios in the Kingdom (inscription CCIS II 2755).

[29] The symbols of the Sky and the Earth, the eagle and the snake, are also symbolic guardians of the tree of life, represented as such on both the Neolithic plates from Gobekli Tepe and on the relief of the Thracian Horseman from Byzantium. As a terrestrial creature, in particular scenes, the snake also symbolises the Earth. The tree of life is a symbol of the spirit of life, all-penetrating and all-embracing, existing in every living creature.

[30] *Диляна Ботева***,** „Тракийският Херос в системата на тракийския пантеон“ Following the research on 665 monuments of Heros, Dilyana Boteva makes the daring conclusion: “From the point of view of the divine hierarchy the snake god stands higher than the Heros but also than the woman...”.

[31] *Александър Фол*, „Тракийският Дионис“, 89 стр.

[32] *Demostenes,* “On the Crown”

[33] *Clement of Alexandria*, “Exhortation“

[34] *Arnobius*, “Against the Pagans”

[35] *Hesychius*, “Alphabetical Collection of All Words”

[36] *Aristophanes*, “Birds”

[37] *Plutarch,* “Parallel Lives”

[38] *Robert Graves*, Again there

[39] *Plutarch,* Moralia, Isis and Osiris, 35

[40] *Plutarch,* Moralia, Isis and Osiris, 35

[41] *A. Fol*. Thracian Legends, 131

[42] *Herodotus,* 4–94

[43] Obviously, the archer aims at clouds and not at a rock as a popular myth about Mithra says, not supported by any documents.

[44] *Bjørnebye, Jonas* (2007). The mithraea as buildings

[45] *A. Joanne GREIG*, Layout and orientation of cult sanctuaries (Mithraea) dedicated to the mysteries of the Roman god Mithras: The Mithraeum of Angera was oriented so that the rising sun at the equinox penetrated an aperture above the entrance and illuminated the main cult picture;

Bourg-Saint-Andeol Mithraeum Tauroctony looks east across the valley of the Rhone, suggesting that the doorways of the Mithraeum served as crude diaphrames to direct the incoming sunlight onto the tauroctonies.

Examples from CIMRM

Mithraeum Caesarea Maritima, Israel: Two shafts in the ceiling are made so that the light in the Mithraeum falls at an angle, one of which admits light during June ever closer to the altar.

Mithraeum Hawarte / Hawarti, Syria. There is a horizontal gap in the west wall of the main chamber. Experiments have shown that light through this source will fall on the niche, and specifically on the face of Mithras (if a tauroctony relief of normal proportions was present in it) throughout December and up to January 6th.

[46] http://www.ostia-antica.org/regio5/12/12-3.htm

Regio V – Insula XII – Sabazeo (V,XII,3)

[47] *Herodotus,* History – Clio, 131, 132

[48] *Ps. Augistine*, *Quaest. Vet. et novi Test.*, 114, (M.M.M., v. II, p.8)

[49] *Herodotus,* 4–95

[50] *M.J. Vermaseren,* Mithras, the Secret God, London, 1963 г.

[51] The inscription DEO SAMCTO is interesting here. SAMCTO from Latin means *holy*. Then, the beginning of the inscription would mean approximately THE HOLY INVINCIBLE GOD.

[52] *Pseudo-Plutarch*, About Rivers, XXIII. 4. (Ps.Plutarch, *De fluviis*, XXIII. 4.)

[53] *Plutarch,* Moralia, Isis and Osiris, 35

[54] The words defender, guardian, heros, cherubim are synonyms, cf. *П. Георгиев,* Траките, които създадоха християнството.

[55] https://bg.wikipedia.org/wiki/%D0%9C%D0%B0%D1%80%D1%81_(%D0%B1%D0%BE%D0%B3)

[56] http://opensiuc.lib.siu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1445&context=ocj

Franc Kumon The mysteries of Mithra, 204

[57] http://gnosis.org/library/grs-mead/grsm_mythra.htm

George Robert Stowe Mead, The mysteries of Mithra, 1907 VOL. V.

[58] http://www.romanarmy.net/mithras.shtml Mithras Sol Invictvs – An initiate's Guid

[59] http://www.crystalinks.com/mithraism.html Mithraizm – Mithraic Mysteri

[60] *Macrobius*, (Macrob. Saturn, I, 18, 1-11)

[61] http://illyria.proboards.com/thread/36349/game-show-question-slav-greek#ixzz3rv7lWXXyhttp://www.slideshare.net/madopol/macedonia-4000-years-of-albanian-continuance, http://illyria.proboards.com/thread/36349/game-show-question-slav-greek#ixzz3rv7lWXXyhttp://www.slideshare.net/madopol/macedonia-4000-years-of-albanian-continuance

The plate was deciphered by Prof. Dr. Ahmet Leitani from the University of Beirut. The chronicle written with Phoenician symbols reveals the Macedonian invasion on the Balkans in the 8th century BC.

This conclusion is based on the type of late Phoenician symbols, on the use of ΧΣ and ΦΣdouble consonants instead of the later-Greek complex consonants Ξ and Ψ, and also on other facts about both the dialect and the direction of the script.

[62] *Herodotus*, History, Book VII, Polymnia, 73

[63] W. *Dittenberger,* Orient gr. inscr. no 331

[64] *Pausanias*, Phocis

[65] *Константин Рангочев*, Росен Р. Милчев, Проект фолклор и социално-информационни процеси в село Белчин и западната част на Самоковската котловина (2007–2011)

[66] Pergamon Museum, Orpheus is playing the harp in front of Thracian warriors, a krater with red figures from 450-440 BC.

[67] The men are carrying torches, the man in front of the sacrificial altar is holding a caduceus over the fire flames. Because of the darkness and probably in order to be seen, the upper part of the caduceus is also in the form of a torch. The caduceus, as the staff of the messenger or the herald, is known from Thucydides' description, History of the Peloponnesian War, Book One, 53, Translation: Milcho Mirchev, 1979. Quintus Curtius Rufus, Book Three, “Histories of Alexander the Great”

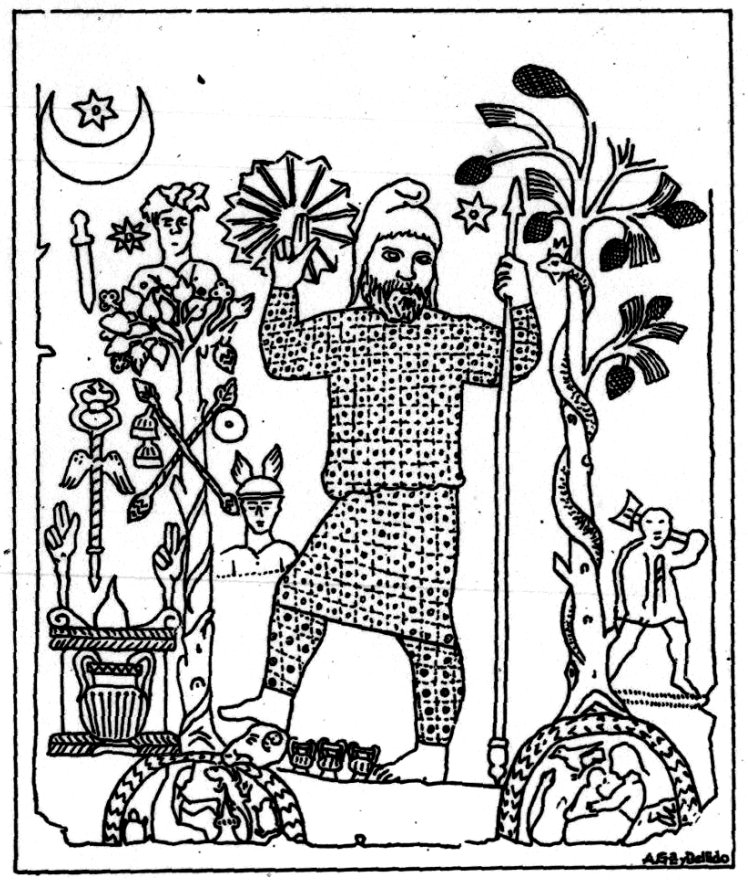
[68] “Volkhv” (wise man) is a word for priest used by the Slavs and borrowed by Christianity. In the Greek and Latin translation of the Bible the name “magus” is used, which is of Iranian origin.

[69] Nowhere in Mithraism has it ever been alluded that Christianity is its opponent or antagonist. Pausanias (115–180) in the “Description of Greece” provides a detailed account of all sanctuaries in the region but does not mention about Christianity.

[70] *Дуриданов,* Езикът на траките, Sura, 40, 51, 65

Attachments

1. Reliefs of Sabazios
The relief from Ampurias



The sun god Sabazios is in the centre of the composition. Behind his back (to the right) is his past – the cave with the Mother (a cave, "birth from the earth"), the infant and the messenger crow; above the cave there is the tree of life with the crowned ("horned, crested") snake – the spirit of the infant Zagreus – crawling up. The tree does not bear fruit but seeds. This is in Sabazios' past. In front of Sabazios there is the fruit tree, the symbol of the god of fertility.

Sabazios is standing on his past, a ram's head, under Sabazios there are three funeral urns, which symbolise the death of the child Zagreus, the youth Dionysus and himself, the man Sabazios. There follows again the cave with the Mother in front of the sacrificial altar and the circle is closed.

The relief from Copenhagen

The tree of life is behind Sabazios, this is the past; on the staff, instead of the fir-cone of Dionysus, there is "Sabazios' hand". To the left one can see objects, which symbolise abundance – a bee, an animal leg, a fir-cone with seeds, which Sabazios will leave behind him. Here again Sabazios has set his food on the ram's head. The Mithras at Sabazios' both sides are decorated with horns, symbols of Sabazios and ritual objects used in the sacraments of Sabazios. Sabazios is also the sacrificial bull, which is symbolically killed by the priest – a symbol of the end of the old year. The funeral urn is by Sabazios' legs. On the staff – a hand with Sabazios' gesture. Sabazios is holding in his hand the fir-cone from his staff, the seed that he will leave.

The relief from Bulgaria, Haskovo

A relief of Dionysus-Sabazios. The relief from Haskovo (Bulgaria) repeats the symbols and the method of depiction used in the relief from Ampurias. However, the relief still features the young Dionysus or Dionysus-Sabazios, the staff still has a fir-cone. Next to it, there is the sun, which has passed its zenith, behind it is the tree of life with the snake, the basket full of snakes, the vessel with phalluses from Dionysus' triumphs. The vessel, used for scooping up seeds, is turned bottom upward – the seed is sown. The past is behind Dionysus-Sabazios. In front of Sabazios, in the liknon, in which phalluses were carried during the processions, does not contain a phallus but Silenus with a face wrinkled from the old age. Sabazios has stretched his right hand over the sacrificial altar and "ritually pours over", "revives" the dead, as it is done nowadays.

The relief of Sabazios from Albania

Behind Sabazios is the tree of life, the Holy Spirit, God; the eagle – the Sky, the snake – the Earth. “The union between the earth and the sky (and the Holy Spirit) gave birth to Zagreus” – the Sun. Zagreus – Dionysus – Sabazios. On this relief, the tree of life gives birth to Sabazios, while on the relief from Copenhagen it is the Sun.

A Dacian relief with the symbols of Zagreus, Dionysus, Sabazios

To the right, there is the tree of life, which "gives birth" to Zagreus, the Sun. Below is the line of life – a ram, a bull, the banquet table with the funeral urn and the mournful crow. However, to the left of the tree of life, the snake is rising again and the cycle is repeated. Every cycle finishes with the image of the sun. The figure behind Sabazios is holding a skull in its hand, the figure in front of Sabazios has lifted a horn in a toast. Under Sabazios there is his past, a figure of a young man. Sabazios is depicted as "the bad Sabazios" waving a battle axe.

2. Images of "Sabazios' hands"

British Museum.

The gesture of the Thracian Holy Trinity. The fir-cone, the symbol of the evergreen tree of live, of the spirit of life, of God. The birth of the son, the sun, the night of nativity; the snake, Sabazios' spirit.

Saint Louis art museum

Above the lightning – an eagle and the amphibian frog, symbols of the Sky and the earth, the father and the great mother whose union gives birth to the Sun.

Barakat gallery

Museum of fine arts Boston

On the figure to the left – again an eagle and the amphibian frog, symbols of the sky and the earth, of the father and the great mother

Melbourne museum, Pompeii

French Museum Collection (RMN)

Museo nacional de arqueologia Subacuatica, Spain
Villa Santa Maria Abruzzo

Dnboswell /Sabazios/

Gradnitsa, Bulgaria

Sabazios' hands, above which there had been an eagle, standing on lightning. To the right – instead of Sabazios, a bull's head is depicted.

Sabazios' hands, on which a festive table and the heads of a ram, a lion and a bull are depicted. Walters Art Museum, Baltimore.

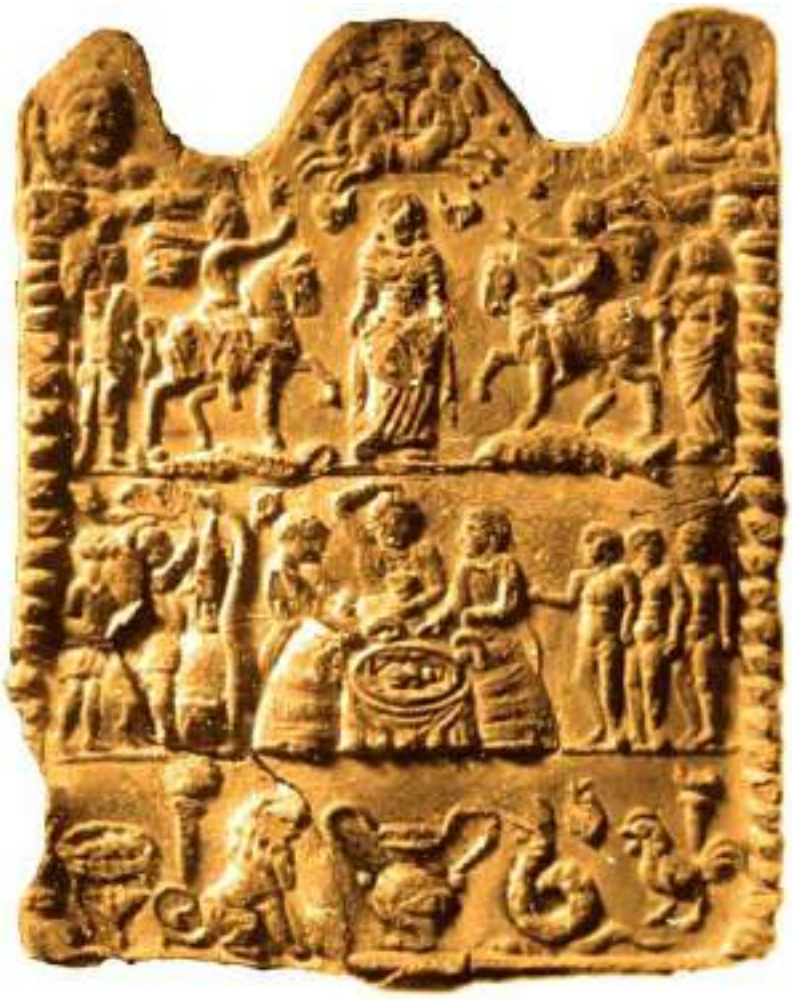
Sabazios, standing on a ram's head, a symbols of his past

Sabazios, a relief from the city of Razgrad, Bulgaria

Sabazios as the god of fertility

3. Reliefs of Danubian Horsemen

The lion and the snake over the funeral urn – the childhood and the adolescence are "buried", initialisation of the "newly-born ones".



Again a lion and a snake over a funeral urn

4. Reliefs of the Thracian Horseman

Istanbul

New York, Rockefeller center

Archaeological Museum of Plovdiv

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National Institute of Archaeology with Museum

Ephesus

Caria, Asia Minor: the only goddess that begs – the mother goddess – health and life for her children

Çanakkale, Turkey: on the sacrificial altar, there is a bull, the snake – Sabazios' soul – is crawling out behind the bull; so far the only relief from ancient times with a horseman riding on a saddle

National Institute of Archaeology with Museum, Bulgaria

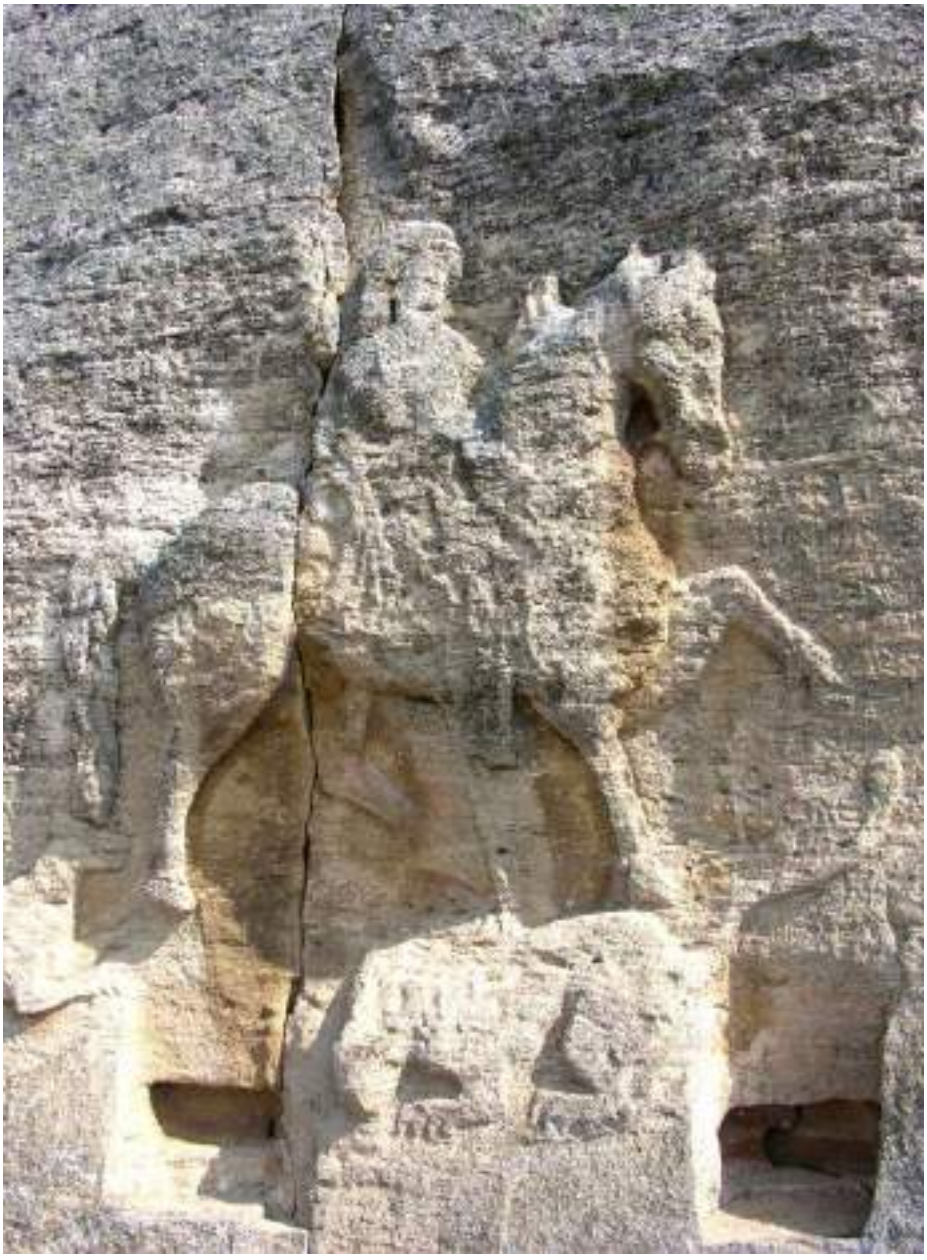
Plovdiv, a gift for the lion, the pouring urn is under the paw

A horseman with a gift for the lion, Dionysus

Archaeological Museum, Sofia

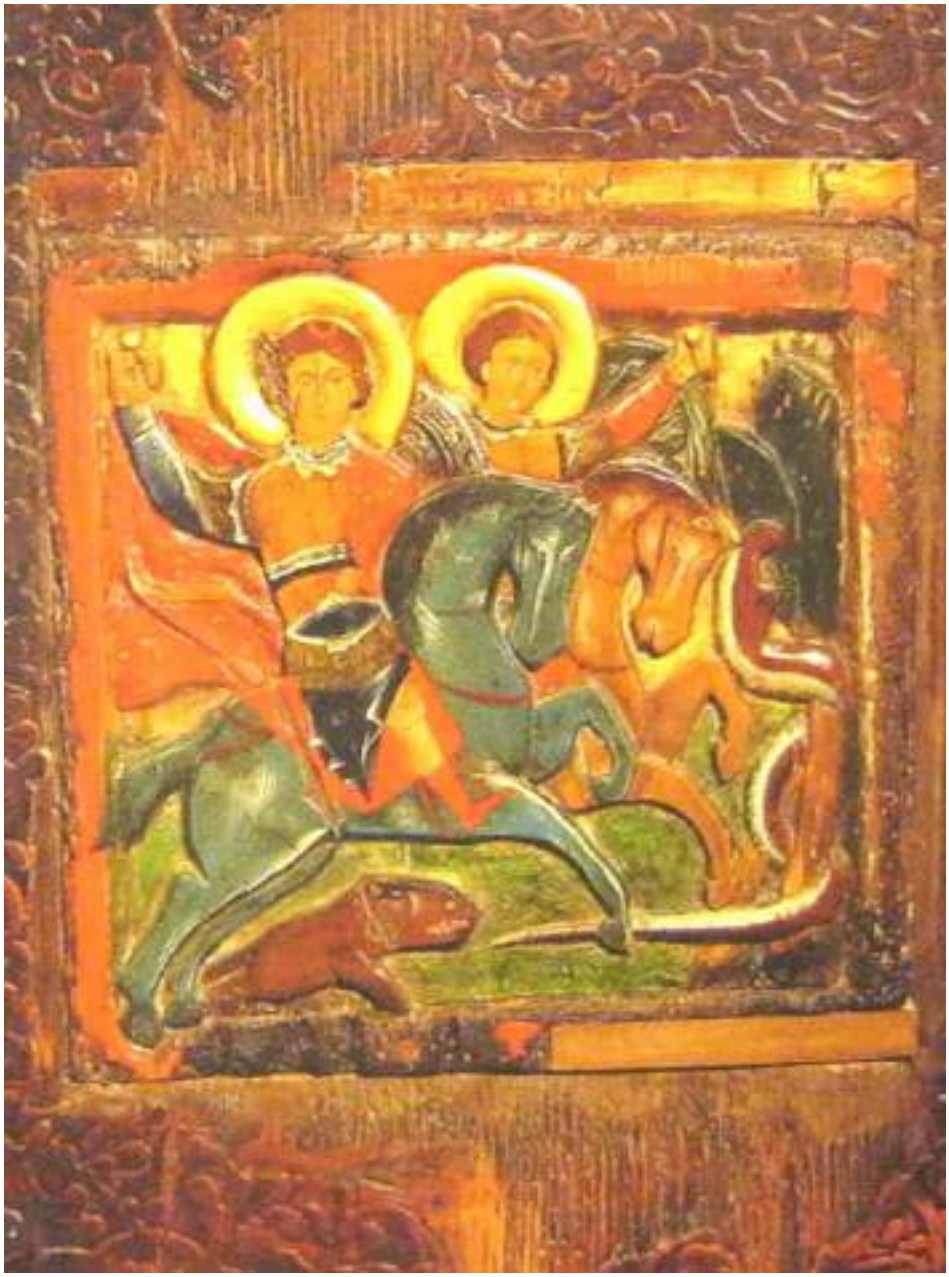
A Thracian family and a horseman with Sabazios' gesture

Archaeological Museum, Varna



The mother goddess, Madara

Reconstruction of the relief of the mother goddess, Madara



A Christian icon with the Thracian symbols – the snake and the tree of life

5. Reliefs of Mithra

CIMRM 548

CIMRM 75

CIMRM 592

Royal Ontario Museum, Canada. CIMRM 81

Kurtovo Konare, Bulgaria, CIMRM 2338

CIMRM 335

Archaeological museum, Venice

CIMRM 650-651

CIMRM 596

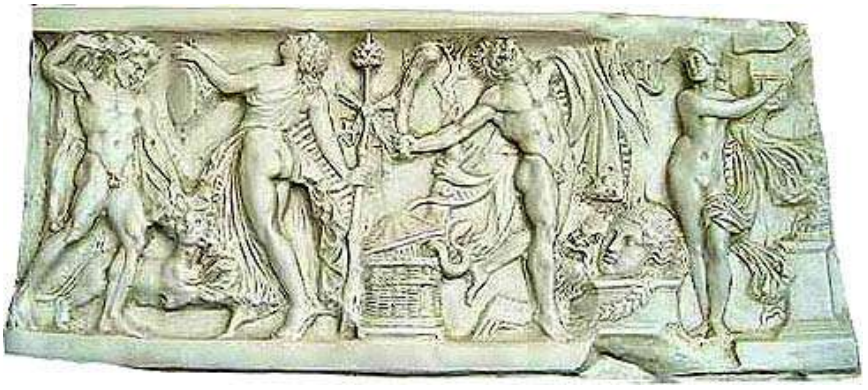
CIMRM 771

6. Dionysus

A satyr, a snake, a tree with a fir-cone, at the back – a woman is carrying a liknon with phalluses

Dionysus, a staff with a fir-cone, a young lion

A satyr and a lion



A lion, a staff with a fir-cone, a basked with a snake

A snake, a lion cub

National Archaeological Museum, Sofia

The “Drunk Dionysus” embracing a satyr with a whistle; the second one is carrying a basket with snakes. Wine is pouring from the horn in Dionysus’ hand, “the lion is drunk”.